

Do you think God can't see through your mask?

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[0 : 0 0] And we're going to turn now to our reading for this morning and we are in Luke's Gospel. And Luke chapter 11, and we are reading from verse 27.

So please do turn your Bibles to Luke chapter 11 and verse 27. We're reading through to chapter 12 verse 5.

And part of this is actually what we were looking at on Wednesday evening at the prayer meeting. Sean was opening up parts of this for us. So I think it's something the Lord wants us to hear this week, don't you think?

But Luke chapter 11, and I'll read from verse 27. As Jesus said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you nursed.

But he said, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it. When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, This generation is an evil generation.

[1 : 1 2] It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.

The Queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see by the light.

Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light. But when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. Therefore, be careful, lest the light in you be darkness.

[2 : 2 2] If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light. While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him.

So he went in and reclined at table. The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. And the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.

You fools. Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give as arms those things that are within.

And behold, everything is clean for you. But woe to you, Pharisees. If you tithe, mint, and rue, and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God.

These you ought to have done without neglecting the others. Woe to you, Pharisees. For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you.

- [3 : 31] For you are like unmarked graves. And people walk over them without knowing it. One of the lawyers answered him. Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.
- And he said, woe to you lawyers also. For you load people with burdens hard to bear. And you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.
- Woe to you. For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses. And you consent to the deeds of your fathers.
- For they killed them. And you build their tombs. Therefore, also the wisdom of God said, I will send them prophets and apostles. Some of whom they will kill and persecute.
- So that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world. May be charged against this generation. From the blood of Abel. To the blood of Zechariah. Who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.
- [4 : 32] Yes, I tell you. It will be required. Of this generation. Woe to you lawyers. For you have taken away the key of knowledge.
- You did not enter yourselves. And you hindered those who are entering. As he went away from there. The scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard.
- And provoke him to speak about many things. Lying in wait for him. To catch him on something he might say. In the meantime. When so many thousands of the people.
- Had gathered together. That they were trampling one another. He began to say to his disciples first. Beware of the leaven. Of the Pharisees. Which is hypocrisy.
- Nothing. Is covered up. That will not be revealed. Or hidden. That will not be known. Therefore. Whatever you have said in the dark. Shall be heard in the light.
- [5 : 33] And what you have whispered. In private rooms. Shall be proclaimed. On the housetops. I tell you. My friends.
- Do not fear. Those who kill the body. And after that. Have nothing more they can do. But I will warn you. Whom to fear. Fear him.
- Who after he is killed. Has authority. To cast into hell. Yes. I tell you. Fear him. Amen.
- This is the word of the Lord. And may he bless it to us. This morning. We'll do.
- Turn with me to Luke. Luke's gospel. Chapter 11. And the passage that we read there. Back in the spring. When lockdown began. We spent a few weeks.
- [6 : 31] Looking at some of. The many pointed questions. That the Bible. Puts to us. As human beings. Now people. Tend to think today. That it's us.
- Who asked the difficult questions. Of God. But in fact. It's always been actually. The reverse. That's true. It's God. Who regularly. Puts man.
- In the dock. And it's we. Who face all the. The difficult questions. Questions that. We often have no answers to. Or whose answers. In fact.
- Make us very. Uncomfortable. Which of course. Is why most people. Try to hide. And stop engaging. With these questions. Until. Some major crisis.
- In life. May make them. Have to face up. To these things. Like. The fragility. And the frailty. Of our mortality. For example. When a new disease. Confronts us. As we've all.
- [7 : 24] Recently experienced. And. And Jesus himself. Is very fond. Of posing. Pointed questions. To us. Rather like. The question.
- That's implied here. In Luke chapter 11. Verse 40. Where Jesus. Speaks to some. Virtue signaling. Pharisees. Who are obsessed. With their. Outward ablutions. And he says.
- You fools. Did not he. Who made the outside. Make the inside. Also. In other words. Do you really think. That God. Can't see.

Right through you. Do you really think. God is blind. That seems to me. That that's a very important. Question. For our. Society today. And let me tell you.

Why. Think about this paradox. Our society. Is one. Which is. Constantly. Now. Erupting. Into outrage.

[8 : 17] Especially. We're outraged. We're outraged. I think. Very particularly. When we encounter. Hypocrisy. Hypocrisy. Might be one of the very few. Sins that actually.

Everyone really does. Look down on still. And fair enough. So. So if a politician. Or somebody. In authority. Is caught saying one thing. And. And doing another.

Then they'll be hounded immediately. Won't they. By Twitter. By social media. They'll be pursued. In the tabloid press. To utter destruction. So. The. The chief medical officer.

For example. Who was never off the airways. Preaching to everyone. Stay at home. Save lives. Well. When she's photographed. Having a walk. Near. Her second home. In the country. That she's gone to.

And visited. Well. Boom. It's just a matter of time. Isn't it. Before. They're going to have to resign. Not actually. Because anybody really thought. She put anybody at risk at all. But simply.

[9 : 14] Because. It was seen to be. A hypocrite. Exactly the same thing. With. The government advisor. Who was. Widely. Known to be behind the science.

For the lockdown itself. With all his predictions. Of a. Half a million people dying. And so on. When he dodged. Lockdown himself. To have a trist. With his married lover. Well. He too. Was taken to the cleaners.

Not actually. Because anybody really cared. That. Professor lockdown. Became professor pants down. As the. The sun headline. Had it. Nobody really cared about that. What they cared about. Was the hypocrisy.

Somebody. Saying one thing. To everybody else. But clearly. Not believing it himself. And so doing very differently. In his own situation. And. We hate. That kind of hypocrisy. Rightly so.

And yet. Here's the irony. Here's the. The paradox. At the same time. I think. It's never been more the case.

[10 : 08] That we're also. A society. That's obsessed. With style. At the expense. Of substance. At outward appearance. At the expense. Of. Reality. Outward show.

Outwardly. Signaling. Our virtue. That has come to trump. The inward truth. And reality. To really quite astonishing degree. And we've created a world.

Where we. Convince ourselves. That if we talk enough. About success. Then we'll have success. If we say often enough. That something is so. Well. That it becomes so.

We saw it. A decade or so ago. In economics. And the run up to the great. Global financial crisis. Where one of our former chancellors. Said that we've abolished.

Boom and bust. And. The country partied along. In a debt fuel boom. And then of course. Went bust. Just like everybody else. But.

[11 : 05] Not a lot seems to have changed. We're still being told. Aren't we. That we can consume. Our way to growth. That we can borrow. And borrow. In order to spend. And spend. As a tomorrow. Will never come. Some years ago.

Somebody coined the phrase. Hedonomics. Hedonism. Poured into economics. So that the news. Is always going to be good. If the economy is picking up. It's good news. Money pours into the financial markets.

If. It's crashing. Well. That's actually good news too. Because. Central banks. Can print all the money. That you need. Out of thin air. What do you know? Money still pours in.

And stocks. Still go up. Never mind reality. We can create. A neverland. Where you can always have your cake. And always eat it too. And the world has become.

Marvelously. Adept. At keeping up. And at talking up. Economic appearances. We see it. In politics. Just the same. From all sides. With.

[12 : 03] The relentless propaganda. That. We're being fed. All of the time. 20 years ago. We used to talk about. Spin doctors. You hardly ever hear that term. Now do you? Because the spin.

Has just become normal. Substance. So often. It's just being. Being swept aside. So. So you can have a national leader. One of the great powers. You can just assert. No. No. No. These figures.

Don't show us in a bad light. In fact. We're the envy of the world. We've got the lowest mortality rates. In the world. The leader says it. And it's so. Apparently. Good enough.

For many people. It seems. We have the government. That's faced with figures. That show. Their deaths. In nursing homes. Are actually double. What they are elsewhere. And the simple answer to that is.

No. No. Elsewhere. They can't count. And so that just becomes. Fact. For many people. We see it in the world of education. We tell ourselves. That we're getting better.

[12 : 55] And better. And better educated. And so we must be coming. Clever. And clever. And more able. Than ever before. Well certainly. In today's world. We've got far more qualifications.

Than ever before. And we like to believe. Therefore. That we know. More and more and more. More than 50% of our population. Now. Young folk get degrees from university. It was only 2% in 1960.

But is our nation. Showing 25 times. The health. Intellectually. Well it's a question. Does the substance.

Really. Match up with the appearance. I could go on. But I think it's just a very interesting thing. To ponder. That we live. In a society.

That hates hypocrisy. That hates. Falsity. And inconsistency. And yet. We live. So often. Collectively. Fooling ourselves.

[13 : 50] All the time. And we can collude together. To believe. Any amount of spin. So that we don't have to face up. To the awkward truths. About life. And the world.

That are actually much easier. To hide from. And in fact. We're often. Sad to say. Often fooling ourselves. Even about our disdain. For hypocrisy. Even that.

Is often hypocrisy. Isn't it? Because. We're all fooling ourselves. And fooling others. All the time. We're all. Acting as hypocrites. In that way. It's just that. My.

Virtuous brand. Of hypocrisy. Is very different. From your. Iniquitous brand. It's very easy. Today. Isn't it? To find an. An echo chamber. In social media.

Or whatever. To just shore up. Our own. Virtuous hypocrisy. And to tear down. Others. Iniquitous hypocrisy. Iniquity. But here's the thing. We. We. We always. Tend to think.

[14 : 47] That it's others. Who are the ones. Being fooled. Not us. And we tend to think. Even if it's unconscious. That we ourselves.

Are fooling others. That we can project. An image of ourselves. That we want. Other people. To see. And that's what they'll see. That's. That's the very essence. of social media, isn't it?

It's all about being seen and being heard in the social media world, projecting the image that you want to project. And everyone's doing that. And yet, none of us think that we're ever being fooled by anybody else.

We like to think that other people can't see through us even if we know that we can see right through other people. And because it's so deeply ingrained in us to think like that, we also tend to think that God can't see through us either.

And we tend to think that we can live fooling God in just that same way. We like to think that we're like the hypocrites, the hypocrites on the Greek stage.

[15 : 53] That's where the word originates. It was actors who wore masks to pretend to be something else. Well, we're all supposed to wear masks today in certain places to keep COVID away.

But the truth is, we can be wearing masks a lot of the time to keep God's gaze away from us so that we can fool God. God can be fooled into leaving us alone.

To think that we're doing fine. To think that we're even doing very well before God. And therefore, what he sees of us surely must deserve his praise. And that is true today.

That was true in Jesus' day, just the same. But Jesus, Jesus was the great whistleblower, the great exposé.

He won't let people get away with that. No. He calls a spade a spade. And he forces uncomfortable confrontations with all these sorts of God-avoidance mechanisms.

[16 : 51] Because with Jesus, there's no sham. There is no hypocrisy. There is nothing hidden behind his mask. What you see is what you get.

And it's very unnerving when you're faced up with that kind of person. I remember years back, I think it was 1991, wasn't it?

When Billy Graham was last on a major campaign in this country. And I remember he went on the TV chat show with Terry Wogan. Some of you will remember those shows, those older among you.

And Terry Wogan was chatting to him. He had a lovely way, didn't he, Terry Wogan? But he was trying to flatter Billy Graham. He kept trying to turn the conversation to other things.

But Billy Graham kept coming right back to Terry Wogan and asking him direct questions. And at one point he said, well, what about you, Terry? Have you ever dealt personally with the Lord Jesus Christ?

[17 : 47] And I think Terry Wogan was very discomfited on the spot. He was direct, you see, like Jesus. Like Jesus here in verse 40. In the face of a great deal of impressive religious show from the Pharisees, Jesus said, you fools.

Didn't he who made the outside make the inside also? Do you really think God is blind? Do you think you can fool God? Do you think you can hide behind that mask?

Are you crazy? It's what Jesus is saying to them. And that's the question that Jesus asks every one of us with very good reason. Because we are always trying to mask ourselves from God.

We're always acting the hypocrite. But no, says Jesus. You can't fool God. And you better realize that. And here in this chapter, in Luke chapter 11, Jesus exposes two very different strategies for self-protection against the real God.

Very different. In fact, opposite strategies. But both of them self-deluding. Both of them hypocrisy and sham. And the reality is that the real God sees these things a mile off.

[19 : 10] So we better take it seriously. And Jesus is speaking not to other people, but to us. This is something he's speaking to us as his followers. Notice in chapter 12, verse 1. It's to his disciples that he says, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

Jesus' own followers need to beware of these things. Because it's like yeast. It spreads and it's infectious and it's very hard to get rid of once you've got a yeast infection.

Anyone who ever had athlete's foot knows that very well. It's hard, isn't it? So we better identify what Jesus means here. And first, Jesus exposes the lies that will deceive us.

The masks of hypocrisy, the masks of self-deception that we can so easily wear. And he exposes two different masks. The first there is in verse 27. And it's the mask, I'm going to call it the mask of sentimental spirituality.

Verse 27. A woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Jesus, blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you are nursed. I'm going to call this the new spirituality because actually I think it's something very contemporary to us.

[20 : 27] The effusive reaction that's given here. Blessed be your mother. Blessed be the womb. Blessed be the breasts that bore you. Here's a spirituality that loves effusive shows of devotion, of drama, of emotion.

and there are many forms of that around us today, aren't there? Many religious expressions in different religions. Some of them have a very Christian veneer.

There's a great love these days for cathedrals, for choirs, for the wistful music, for the numinous. In some Christian traditions you'll find it in weeping statues, the saints, in appearances of the Virgin Mary.

That is verse 27, isn't it? Blessed be your mother. But we see it all around in the sort of new age spiritualities of meditation, of yoga, massage, all that sort of thing.

Crystals, the quest for the wholeness that comes from the organic movement and so on, inner cleansing, all that sort of thing. And we see it, I suppose, in what you might call popular folk religion today.

[21 : 31] The great outpourings of public grief that we see. I think it probably began for real back in, was it, 1990, when Princess Diana died.

And all those flowers were laid at the palace doors. And it's normal today, isn't it? There are great outpourings of public grief, vigils, flowers, candles, all that sort of thing. We live, I think, in a world with a rising tide of sentimentalist spirituality.

It's the religion of the day in the 21st century West. But you see, it's a spirituality that is marked by spirituality without the need for morality.

Feelings without doings. We feel spiritual, we're spiritual beings, so we want to express that spirituality, but crucially, we want to be free to do that as we please.

People talk about expressing their spirituality, just as they talk about wanting to express their sexuality. And you see the Hollywood stars, for example, embracing various kind of spiritualities.

[22 : 44] Scientology, for example, is one of the favorite ones. I remember listening to Tom Cruise speaking about Scientology and then the next breath talking about, I think it was his third, possibly even his fourth marriage.

See, any amount of pious effusions of spirituality, but no conception of any of the demands that God might actually make.

But notice here in verse 28, Jesus is not at all impressed by that. Never mind that pious claptrap about spirituality, he says. What matters is personal conduct, hearing the word of God and doing it, obeying it.

Jesus is always saying that, isn't he? It's no use saying, Lord, Lord, it's doing the will of God. It's not good having texts on your wall or crosses on your wall or singing all the songs or whatever it might be unless you hear the word of God and do it.

Loving God and obeying his voice. Now, it's not just this poor woman who's like that. Very many are. Verse 29 talks about the crowds who were increasing and they were just the same.

[24 : 00] They all wanted spectacular spirituality, great display, signs and wonders. But Jesus says to them, that actually is the antithesis of real faith.

Hence, verse 32. The men of Nineveh, the pagans, will rise up and judge this very generation. because real faith means trust in God.

It means giving everything to God through Jesus Christ in obedience. It means surrender of all your independence to him. Verse 28, blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and do it.

But you see, sentimental spirituality doesn't want that. It wants to have all the outward show, all the stuff, without surrender of sovereignty to God in Jesus.

But according to Jesus, you can't have God's blessing without surrender to his control. It's impossible. That's why in verse 29 he says, there'll be no such sign for this generation except the sign, he says, of Jonah.

[25 : 13] Well, what's the sign of Jonah? Well, remember Jonah after he was brought up out of his three days in the belly of the fish, resurrected as it were. He was a resurrected preacher with a message for Nineveh of repentance or perishing in the judgment to come.

In other words, forget sentimentalism, forget self-fooling, take off that mask you're hiding behind and obey the word of God. Repent. That's Jesus' message.

And what the sentimentalist has to realize is that Jesus really speaks as God. He has authority. He is transcendent. It's a flattery, effusive sentimentality.

That's no good. You really think God's blind? No. You can't fool God. You might fool yourself, but not him. Verse 40, he sees the inside as well.

He sees behind the mask that you put on. Well, maybe that speaks to some of us today in particular. You see, often we think we're free, don't we?

[26 : 25] We think we're keeping the demands of God far at bay. But we're not free to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ that way.

Because all true relationships make demands, don't they? They demand commitment. And that mask of sentimental spirituality actually is keeping those demands at bay and therefore it's keeping Jesus at bay.

That's the first lie that deceives us, the mask of sentimental spirituality. But there's a second kind of mask that we hide behind, very different, but actually has exactly the same effect.

And it's the mask of sanctimonious morality, of self-justifying morality. I'll call that sort of traditional religion.

It's the older kind of religion and morality that perhaps we're familiar with. Although, it's making a big comeback today. We are certainly becoming the virtue signaling generation once again. And the Pharisees were like that.

[27 : 29] They were very religious outwardly, but actually they kept God at bay too by their very moralism. Theirs was not a spirituality without morality.

Rather, theirs was a mask of super morality that was actually a cloak of conceit and of self-satisfaction. And that's just as effective in killing off any real relationship with God.

Outwardly, here you've got very religious and moral people. They were applauded by society. They would have been celebrated on Twitter, on Facebook, showered with praise for doing all the right things.

And so much so that they invested in all kinds of extreme ways to signal their virtue to society. Look at verse 42. See the Bible, well, we all know it, commands tithing, giving a tenth of your substance to God.

Well, that's a mark, isn't it, of thanks to God, thanks for God's blessing. It's also a mark of your trust in God. You give him the first and the best of your harvest, trusting him to provide for the rest.

[28 : 38] But these men went to absolute extremes. Verse 42, they tithe their mint, their rue, their herbs. I mean, you can imagine the scene in the garden, cutting up your basil, cutting up your coriander and so on.

One for the Lord, nine for me. One for the Lord, nine for me. You wonder what happened when they went to the temple. Did they put it in the offering bag along with the rest of it? What do the priest thinks?

What's all this herbs doing in here? It's absurd. But it's serious, isn't it? It's not actually a joke, really. Because here are people surrounding themselves with all sorts of virtue signaling morality and religion.

Indeed, they're sanctimonious in the extreme, ready to find fault with others in the most trivial of ways. Look at verse 38. Jesus follows.

Oh, they don't wash their hands properly before dinner. I'm sure they don't even use hand sanitizer. Oh, he doesn't wear a tie when he comes to church for communion.

[29 : 45] Well, did you see what she was wearing for church? Well, that sort of thing's said sometimes, isn't it? And yet, in reality, you see, what Jesus is saying is these kind of people are totally blind to the fact that they're miles away from the heart of love that God desires from us and that God commands from us.

The moralist doesn't have any problem with authority in the abstract sense. He's not like the sentimentalist in that way. He can cope with the idea that God is transcendent and commands.

But what he can't cope with is the fact that God actually gets right up close and personal with every one of us, that God is imminent, that he's near, and that he has come to us personally in the Lord Jesus Christ and that the Lord Jesus Christ speaks, therefore, with absolute authority to you and to me personally for our lives.

And therefore, the true morality, the real way, the only way to please God is to listen to Jesus and to love Jesus and to join Jesus and the people of Jesus in his saving mission to this world.

So the Pharisees, very religious, very righteous, upright, but they're fooling themselves just as much as the rest. And that kind of moralism and religiosity, no matter how apparently orthodox it is, it's just like the mask of sentimental spirituality because it keeps the real God, the living God, made known in Jesus, away at arm's length.

[31 : 28] The one wants an experience of God without God's authority in Jesus. The other wants the authority but with no experience of God as real in Jesus Christ, with no living knowledge of him.

And friends, what Jesus is saying is both of these are lies that deceive us. Both of these are masks that keep the real God at arm's length from us.

The moralist might very well fool others with their sham godliness, but all too often actually others can see through it plainly enough. Charles Dickens was a great exposé, wasn't he, of that kind of hypocrisy, especially that moralistic hypocrisy.

If you've ever read his books, if you've ever read Bleak House, it's a bleak book indeed, but he has this character called Mrs. Jellaby who's consumed by the needs of the natives far away in Brubulagar, but whose actual own family and household right in front of her nose are totally neglected and unloved.

And Dickens has this biting observation, Mrs. Jellaby's eyes had a curious habit of looking a long way off, as if she could see nothing nearer than Africa.

[32 : 54] Now that's the mask, isn't it, of sanctimonious moralism. Now if you're not a Christian, you may very well think that actually that is what Christianity is all about, because alas, perhaps you have met people who profess to be Christians who are like that, but friends, that is not real Christianity.

Nothing can be further from the truth. And Jesus, as you see, is equally devastating in condemnation of that kind of thing, perhaps more so than even he condemns the kind of nebulous sentimental spirituality.

Just look at verses 42 to 52. Six times Jesus begins with woe to you. Woe to you, Pharisees.

Woe to you, the most outwardly religious people of the day. And he exposes the reality about them. Look at verse 43.

It's all about yourself. It's not about God. You love the best seats in the synagogues and the best places in the marketplaces for yourself. It's not really love of God that's motivating you at all.

[34 : 06] It's love of yourself. You want recognition, good seats, greetings, all of that. And just like the others whom you despise, you are avoiding the real demands of the real God and a real relationship with him.

And in fact, he says, you're poisoning others away from it. You're acting like unmarked graves that spread contagion unknowingly to others. Verse 42, they neglect utterly the love of God and the love of man, their neighbor.

But real relationship with God means loving God and loving your neighbor open-endedly with no limits to that positive command.

But of course, that's very scary. It's much easier, isn't it, to limit that demand because if it's limited, then we can feel sure that we've met it and we're safe and we're virtuous.

It's like an exam syllabus, isn't it? So often, what you want to know is, tell me exactly what I have to do just to pass that exam, nothing more. I remember it in some of my medical exams, when you set the membership for the College of Physicians, all kinds of diseases that only exist in those exams and never in real life, but you have to learn all about them and you learn what you need to do to pass the exam.

[35 : 31] That's what we instinctively want, isn't it? not just in exams, but in life. Just tell me what to do, tell me the minimum necessary so I can get the ticket. And that puts us in the driving seat, doesn't it?

And it allows us to feel self-righteous that I've done what's required, so surely God must bless me. See, that's just another mask, it's just another protective barrier to keep the real God and his demands at bay.

a self-justifying morality keeps God out of your life just as effectively as sentimentalist spirituality does.

And friends, Jesus says that is a real danger for Christians, a real danger for disciples, for church people. Chapter 12, verse 1 again, you, he says, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

He's saying, we fall into that trap all the time. And God is not blind. God sees it, all of it. And we're rumbled.

[36 : 43] Oh dear, it's very hard, isn't it, when we start to take the Bible seriously. It's very humiliating, it's humbling. So what's the answer?

Well, in verse 33 here, Jesus turns from the lies that can only deceive us to the light that alone can actually deliver us.

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

That's what hypocrisy is. Whatever the form is, it's a mask, not one that covers our nose and mouth, but it's a mask that covers our eyes so we don't see, we're blind. It makes us avoid the true light of Jesus Christ, where you meet God's full authority and where you meet God truly up close and personally.

And verse 33 to 36 here, look at them, they tell us that that's what people are doing in all these different ways. One way is the way of verse 33.

[37 : 58] It's to shut out the light altogether, to hide it in a cellar, to hide it under a bowl as he says. That's the way of amoral spirituality, of merely sentimental spirituality.

You hide, you snuff out the challenge of the real Jesus altogether under an avalanche of sentimentalism. Long on emotion, long on religious ritual, blessed is the womb that bore you and all of that, but no voice of God is heard or heeded.

That's what many want in our own day, even sadly within the professing church. People who want spirituality but don't want the authority of the living God, don't want the demands of a Jesus who is Lord or the scriptures which speak with authority of his lordship.

But another way of course is the way of verses 34 and 35 here, which is the way of closing your eyes to the real truth, taming the truth, domesticating the truth.

When your eye's healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it's bad, your body is full of darkness. So be careful, lest the light in you be darkness.

[39 : 13] darkness. You see, you turn the light of God, you turn the precious beauty of the law of God, the word of God, you turn it into darkness.

How do you do that? Well, just by paying lip service to it. By turning it into a barren moralism that thinks it's good but actually is bad.

In fact, it's dead, says Jesus, because it's unaccompanied by any real and living knowledge of the Savior himself.

There's nothing personal. There's nothing of the heart. There's nothing real. There's nothing of a true relationship with him. And that is the way of so much dead religiosity.

Sanctimoniousness. It's just deadly. And there are professing Christians, aren't there, who are like that? There are churches that can be like that. And either one of these, you see, says Jesus, keeps out the real light of life because it keeps the real Jesus Christ at bay.

[40 : 24] And it allows us maybe to fool ourselves and to fool others perhaps, but not God. He's not fooled, not ever. Do you really think God is blind? Didn't he who made the outside that you put on show also make the inside?

And he can see it. God isn't blind. None of us can hide from his penetrating gaze.

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

yeast, leaven, grows easily in the dark, doesn't it? If it's kept in the darkness, it will flourish, it will spread always, just as our own propensity to hypocrisy and self-deception will spread.

But light, of course, has a great inhibiting effect on the leaven of self-deception. If that is, it is the true light of Jesus, the true light of his gospel.

[41 : 41] Not a barren moralism with no real personal encounter with Jesus himself, with God our Savior, but nor either a mere amoral sentimental spirituality that won't recognize his authority, won't recognize his lordship, his deity.

But the light of the real Jesus, the risen victorious son of man who like Jonah in his day, now lives to call men and women to true repentance so that they may be saved by the grace of God from the judgment to come.

So the only answer that will save us, liberate us from these lies, is to let the true light of Jesus Christ in deep to our lives and to our hearts.

keep it at bay in your life. Stop your avoidance tactics, whatever they are. Take off your masks because only then, as Jesus says in verse 36 here, only then will your whole body be full of light, inside and outside.

Do we think God's blind? Do we think he can't see in to know the real truth about the state of our hearts before him? No. God isn't blind, but sadly often we are.

[43 : 13] So we need that light of Jesus Christ to search us, to try us. Let his light in. Keep letting it in.

By listening to his word, by letting his word be the light, that will fill your life with that transparent reality. That's the only way to avoid being a fool before God.

It's the only way to be rescued from the tyranny of hypocrisy in our own hearts. Blessed rather, says Jesus, are those who hear the word of God and do it.

Then, verse 36, then your whole body will be full of light and no part will be dark. It'll be wholly bright as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.

Why would any of us want to hide in the dark and go on living in the dark? When the light of God and Jesus Christ can lighten us, cleanse us, and make us pure, clear, and transparent to share that light with others?

[44 : 32] Well, let's pray together. Therefore, be careful, lest the light in you be darkness. But if your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.

Heavenly Father, we confess before you how often we play the hypocrite. We wear the mask to try and fool others, and underneath it all, to think so foolishly we can fool you.

How we need to repent. Forgive us, Lord. Turn our eyes to your light and lift the masks from our eyes, that we should see you and know you truly, and love you, and love your words, that we might hear your word and do it, and so walk in the light all the days of our lives.

Help us, Lord, for we're weak, but you are strong. Hear us. In Jesus' name. Amen.