
Actions Speak Louder Than Words!



Message by Pastor Tom, Interim Lead Pastor
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Scripture Passage 1 John 2:3-11
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If there's one word that none of us would like to hear about ourselves I think that would be the word **HYPOCRITE**, originally a word used in the theatre, to describe an actor or, someone who simply played the part. Then it moved on to describe someone whose life is not authentic. They say one thing, but they actually live another life.

HYPOCRITE is a word that bites!

Use your imagination with me for a moment. John wants us to meet three people in this study today. Three kinds of people who are playing a religious game. They know all the words, all the right moves, all the right phrases. They have got the evangelical church language down to a "T". But they are all phonies! This morning, meet the three hypocrites.

Each hypocrite is introduced in this section by exactly the same phrase in the Greek text. The man who says... (verses 4,6,9) John wants us to meet these hypocrites and see how they are playing the church game.

We will turn each of these hypocritical personalities into an affirming truth and see how each of them challenges us to understand that knowing God has a pragmatic and matter-of-

fact dimension.

Hypocrite #1:

ADORATION WITHOUT ACTION.

4 The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him:

You recall that 1st John is set against a background of what is called gnosticism, from the greek word *gnosis* = knowledge. The gnostics were on this intellectual and climb to some spiritual nirvana. They believed that the knowledge of God was the pinnacle of what they were looking for. So in a way that today we would describe today as being "in your face", John uses the word 'knowledge' in one form or another some 40 times in 105 verses. That's one occurrence for about every 2 1/2 verses.

Remember that one of the aspect of gnosticism was that it was dualistic. That means it divided/separated the spiritual from the material. Not only did it divide them, but it took the attitude that what was spiritual was good and pure and holy.

This is what we should be striving for. On the other hand, what was physical, the material aspects of our world and our lives, were fallen and sinful.

This dualistic dichotomy created for them, and I think it can also create for us, a false understanding of what it means to know God, what it means to be spiritual.

John will simply not allow us to follow that false trail into some mystical paradise. In fact, what he says is that in the affirmation of saying that we know God, actions do speak louder than words!

And when we see the actions of our faith lived out in front of our lives, John says that this gives us the assurance that we know God.

None of us wants to be a hypocrite. We want our faith in God to be real. We want our lives to be authentic. We want to live with credibility. The way we stand as authentic and credible Christians is to make sure with simplicity and consistency that the adoration of our faith are turned into the actions of faith.

Words of worship and devotion, no matter how intense, need to be turned into actions of obedience. Worship, in which we understand the character of God, demands a response, some response. Perhaps the greatest sin we can commit in a response to worship is to do nothing, to remain unchanged.

John has introduced us to the first hypocrite. The person who says he loves God, adores God, worships God, but who does not live out the detailed instructions of His Word and His Will.

Words like obedience and discipline are not very popular today, but they are intricately woven into the tapestry of the Christian life. And if you remove things like discipline and obedience, the tapestry simply unravels. There is not enough thread to hold it together.

The heartbeat of the Christian life is to be found in love and loving God is to be expressed in obedience.

John 14:15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

When we are prompted in even the smallest way to love God with heart and soul, we are freed from thoughts of duty and obligation and we begin to respond to the law written on the heart. When people ask, can you do this or that as a Christian, their asking such

things means that they have very little concept of knowing and loving God.

The other beat of this spiritual rhythm is found in John 15:10. These two truths go together, like heads and tails of the same coin.

[John 15:10] If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love.

Love gives birth to obedience and in its turn, obedience stimulates greater love, which gives birth to obedience and so they keep feeding each other.

Jesus teaches the same truth about the potential emptiness of words alone towards the end of what we call the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 7

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'

23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Where do we start? I do not think that obedience is a vague or general idea. Rather it is a specific issue. One decision after another, one step after another. One issue after another in which we decide again and again to ask, what does God say? What do I do?

You may need to act out the words of confession in the action of baptism in which you declare, **JESUS IS LORD!**

Or perhaps there is something right in your mind and heart right now that you have been reading and studying, and you say, I really need to do that, or you have been thinking about it as you worship. You know you love God, and that is the next step that you have to take.

Remember, being spiritual is not a mystical flight from reality, rather it is usually acting out some aspect of the character of God in daily life.

You are here today because you love God genuinely, you have worshipped him, but **actions speak louder than words.**

What action does loving God want you to take?

Hypocrite #2

CONFESSION WITHOUT IMITATION

6 Whoever claims (the man who says...) to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

7 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard.

8 Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

John knows very well that what he is telling them is not some new revelation. It is an old word. It is the original word. It is what they have always been told. It is exactly the same as what Jesus had told them in the upper room in the shadow of Calvary.

John 13

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

This hypocrite is the person who can confess with great passion how much they love Jesus, whose life had not changed in any radical way. Somehow the intervention of grace does not seem to have made much of a difference. John puts a moral and ethical challenge right in

front of us. We cannot sidestep our way around it.

It is simple. If you say you are a believer in Christ, then live like one! I often say, I do not expect a non-Christian to live like a Christian, but I expect a Christian to live like a Christian.

The goal of the Christian life is not information. People can come to church, read books, listen to tapes, and get all kinds of information and in a tragic irony, not be changed one bit. The whole thrust of the Christian life is imitation. What does it mean to walk in the steps of Jesus?

Romans 8:28-29, a passage that gets terribly abused. People baptize all kinds of human tragedies as the will of God.

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son

There are at least two key truths in that which are often overlooked.

1. It does not say that all things are good. It says that all things work together (greek = synergy) for good.

Some things in and of themselves are not good. Children die. Hurricanes destroy homes. Money and food goes to armies and hundreds of thousands starve to death. We must not label these human sufferings as good.

But some things work together for a good that cannot be seen in their separateness.

There is a great statement at the end of Genesis when Joseph stands before his brothers. These are the brothers who were going to leave him for dead. Then sold him into slavery, and he rose to power. Eventually they come begging for food in a famine, and they recognize him. Joseph says "what you meant as evil, God used for good."

2. The end goal (what is called the **TELOS = TELEOLOGY** the end purpose) of our lives is that we will be shaped and transformed into the likeness of Christ. So we need to ask, how does this event move me towards that goal?

Words are not enough. Actions speak louder than words, and the actions of our lives need to echo and resonate with and reflect the life of Jesus.

Some of you wear a band with 4 letters WWJD. It stands for...

Think about what we have learned, sung and affirmed today in Christian truth, what we believe about Jesus, and ask yourselves this week, what will it mean for me to act out what I believe?

Hypocrite #3

REVELATION WITHOUT COMPASSION

9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.

10 Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.

11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

Gnosticism had some key words. We have already seen the knowledge was a key word for them. Here is another, light. They talked about the light that was to illumine our lives. The inner light that was to help us see and dispel the inner darkness. John has absolutely no hesitation is using this gnostic buzz-word and getting as much mileage as he can out of it for the sake of the Gospel. Christians are people of revelation, walking in the light of God's truth.

Jesus said that light and darkness are not external. They are internal.

Matthew 6

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.

23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Of course, we need light. We need inner illumination, but that Light comes from Christ. Remember that it was John's Gospel that says Jesus is the light of the world, and if you have that inner light shining in your life, it will not lead you into some mystical journey away from people. Rather it will lead you towards your fellow Christians to walk and act in love. John will bring this truth before us again and again. He will not let us escape its demands. Revelation, the insight of walking in the light of God, demands compassion.

Fellowship is not a vague mystical idea that exists only in the realm of the mystical and spiritual. Fellowship is real people, flesh and blood, struggles and weaknesses, tears and mistakes, hurts and forgiveness.

The existentialist philosopher Sartre said that "Hell is other people." To him, life with all its questions and puzzles was at least bearable until people came along.

I think about the range of emotions and responses that perhaps lie between hate and active love.

#1 At one end of the spectrum there can be the strong emotion of hate. But I don't think any of us get up in the morning with a strategy formed in our mind to go out and hate someone. So how do we hate? Sin seldom comes as a front attack, it usually comes as a disguise.

#2 The next stage is perhaps apathy. We do not hate. We don't feel anything towards them. Who cares? Whatever happens to them is too bad. Remember the story of the Good Samaritan, just walk past on the other side of the street.

#3 The next stage on the spectrum is perhaps "like". We like someone. It is kind of like the first date. It is fun to be with them. We enjoy their company, but we would not want them in our lives all the time. This is the stage of compliments. We can affirm and praise, which is fine and good. It is genuine, not superficial, but it only goes so far.

#4 Sympathy is perhaps next. It is when we feel the pain that someone is going through. We can bear burdens with them. We stand at a graveside with them. We try to come alongside them in times of stress, but when all is said and done, there is a time for us to leave them and we go home, back to our lives, by enlarge unchanged.

We genuinely give our feelings of understanding and sympathy, but we are seldom changed in a relationship at this level.

#5 The final level is one of active love, which is born out of compassion.

One of the strongest words that is ever used to describe the heart of Jesus is the word compassion. Jesus saw people in great need and his eyes and heart were filled with compassion for them. He looked over a city and he felt compassion for it. It was compassion that moved Jesus to take the kind of action that involved himself in the lives of others. Compassion gives birth to love, not just in feeling, or words—but love in action.

In his book *True Spirituality*, Francis Schaeffer wrote that if I truly love a man [person], I will desire for them to become all that they can become on the basis of the finished work of Christ.

What would it mean to look at someone, and our starting point for them is the work of the cross, and then our active love is for them to become all that they can become, and we are willing to do whatever is within our power to realise that for them.

Compassion is the call of love that is willing to become involved enough in another person's life. Their joys and their pain, their laughter and their tears, so that they will know that whatever they are walking through, they will know that they are not alone.

When we step into the deep waters of compassion with someone else, so that our actions and involvement changes their lives, we are not left unchanged by the process. On the contrary, we are changed in some part of our being. We are never the same once compassion enters our lives. When compassion captures our heart, its embrace profoundly changes us. We will never be the same again. Walking in the light of the love of God gives birth to compassion which leads to active love.

We cannot do that for everyone here, or for everyone we know. Perhaps God can love wholesale. We can only love retail, one person at a time.

So where do we start? I can only think as a man, who is married. So you need to let me use this as my starting place. You need to create your own starting place.

Imagine in every marriage if we applied that deep endeavour of active sacrificial love towards our spouse. What would marriages be like if husbands lived up to the words of their marriage vows? To love, honor, cherish, in the words of the old Anglican wedding service "with my body, I thee worship..."

This is how the Apostle Paul puts it.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

That is a call to nothing less than activity of sacrificial love in the most intimate place to practice our faith, your marriage. If you are not married, God has given you at least one other person to whom you owe actions that match your words.

You recall a familiar passage from *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare.

All the world's a stage.

And all the men and women merely players.

They have their exits and their entrances.

Is that all each day is? Is that all relationships are? Is that all church and fellowship is? Places and people where we learn to say the right lines, like good actors learn to listen for the right cues and say our carefully rehearsed lines, give our compliments, and then at the end of the day we walk off the stage. We wash off our makeup and become ourselves for those few hours before we go to bed.

Authentic living in the light of God will not let us become actors before God, or before others.

Jesus said that he came to love, and words were not enough. It was acted out on the cross, and he did not come as an actor who simply played the part. The blood was not fake blood that was washed off at the end of the day. The tears for the words were not fake tears that quickly dried up when the scene was over. The resurrection was not a scene for an actor who had been killed off during the day and who gets up and shakes the dust off when the day's acting is over. It was a real death, that called for, that demanded nothing less than real resurrection.

None of us wants to live like hypocrites, or be called hypocrites.

Authentic worship calls for response. Words of adoration are not enough.

Authentic confession calls for life-change. **Actions speak louder than words.**

Authentic illumination calls for compassion. Actors need not bother to apply.

I think every one of us know right now some place in our lives in which we have to take action. The time for words is over. There is nothing more that needs to be said. We simply need to get on with it and do it.

Actions speak louder than words.