

Vision 2020: Authenticity

Lead-in

This year our vision is to conquer St. Clair County and the nations for Jesus Christ, one gospel conversation at a time. If you could only use three words to describe our heartbeat for 2020 it would be substance, authenticity, and mission. The first pillar is substance, as we desire to be a people built upon the Rock of Jesus Christ. Today we look at the second pillar of this vision, authenticity. If honest, you are ok settling for something that is close to the real thing. We live in a world of semi-authentic.

Marketing demonstrates your acceptance of semi-authentic as many products are designed to imitate the real thing. There is plastic decking that looks like real wood. Vinyl flooring that appears to be ceramic tile or ceramic tile that looks like wood. You can purchase a non-meat hamburger that is “better than beef.”

There is even an English invention called spray-on Mud is designed for use on the outside of your SUV. “Spray it on and friends might think you've just returned from a wilderness adventure.” “If they want an authentic look,” says inventor Colin Dowse, “There's not a lot else they can do. There's not a lot of mud in Chelsea.”

There are many expressions of imitation Christianity that we can try to pass off as the real thing. Good wishes can be mistaken for prayer. Success can be misconstrued as spiritual achievement. Inspirational bumper stickers and symbols are evangelism. Excellent music can cover for authentic worship of the heart. Christian clichés can be handed out as biblical wisdom. An attractive personality can be mistaken for a Spirit-filled life, and moral behavior as righteousness.

What would it look like, if this community of faith pursued authentic relationship with Jesus and others above all else?

Matthew 23:27-28 “Let’s Get Real”

Authentic Relationship

Woe! Jesus uses the common OT form of interjection—an exclamation of “**how greatly one will suffer mingling doom with pity.**” Messiah is on one hand warning inauthentic people and on the other deeply saddened by their condition.

What we read today is the fifth of seven woes to the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus is trying to get their attention!

Jesus begins speaking to a group called the **Pharisees**. Out of the four distinct Jewish sects of the time (Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes, and Pharisees) the Pharisees were the most conservative and biblically grounded. They valued the law and the tradition of the fathers. You would also find a scribe in every synagogue and thus Jesus interacted with this group a lot.

Don't be like the hypocrites. **one who pretends to be other than he really is**. Often used during the **Greek theatre to describe the one who wore a mask and pretended to be another character**.

Jesus and Non-Christians have something in common, they both hate hypocrites. I believe this is true because they can see right through the mask and theatre. For the non-believer It's not that they necessarily hate your message, but they believe that you don't believe it. Hypocrisy has a way of invalidating your message.

Here is the spiritual lesson: **You will never begin a relationship with Jesus until you put down your mask**. What if every day you prayed, "Lord help me put down my mask before you today!"

I believe this is exactly what David prayed when he wrote **Psa. 139:23 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way**. ***You will never enjoy authentic relationship with Messiah until the mask comes off. But when it does, wow what a freedom!***

Inauthentic lives stink. In the ancient world, options were limited on how to treat the bodies of those who had died. So, the ancient world used a process called **Whitewashing** = to cover with lime, plaster, white wash

Over the centuries, the lime, once used to mask the smell of the bodies as they decomposed, hardened into a shell than enveloped the skeletons and the soil that surrounded them. I find it fascinating that Jesus did not say, woe you who carry the **stench of death!** Rather, we said, woe to you who **stink but try to cover it up**. Spiritually, you will never thrive in relationship with Jesus if you are content to keep the bones buried. **You will never experience life if you try to spray spiritual Fabreze on your condition**. **You don't need whitewashing from the outside. You need resurrection from the inside!** Guess what? This is what Jesus offers! Inauthentic lives stink.

Inauthentic lives kill. The leaders looked holy on the outside, luring people into their confidence. But they were a deadly trap, because their true status ("inside") was that of unrighteousness and uncleanness. Pharisees believed that one contracted impurity if even one's **shadow touched a corpse or grave**. Inconspicuous tombs (or limestone ossuaries) would be whitewashed each spring before Passover to warn passersby to avoid them and so avoid impurity. When you live, a life built upon anything but the gospel – **Jesus in your place**- your

example is a **deadly inauthentic trap to others**, *because you proclaim go to church and be well, pray and be accepted, follow these rules and find hope, accept this tradition and receive eternal life*. May we live authentic gospel lives: **We resolve to know knowing but Christ and Him crucified.**

Inauthenticity does not only effect our relationship with the Father, going through the spiritual motions deteriorates our relationships with others.

Authentic Relationships

The living and active Word we encounter today was not a private conversation recorded between the scribes and Pharisees at the local synagogue special business meeting. The passage was an open dialogue in **mixed company (23:1)**: disciples, seekers, spiritual hungry, and pretenders.

Spiritual lesson: don't live your life based on others' perception of you. Life your life with authenticity on what the Father knows about you. This, and only this, leads to deep authentic Christian community. **You will never grow in relationship with others unless you put down your mask.** One of my favorite ministries at **Bethel is CR** on Friday evenings. It's a place where people with hurts, habits, and hang-ups, put down the mask and seek Jesus together.

It's refreshing because I have never heard someone with habit castigate a hurt, or someone with a hang-up laugh at habit. What would your relationships look like if you didn't wear a mask? **Live your life with authenticity based on what that Father knows, not what other people think.**

Why does the Lord desire for us to reject religious hypocrisy? Because he has created you to thrive with others in **community**. **"When we enter into the "in Christ" existence we become one with those who are in Christ. Eternal life is received individually, but it is lived out in community" –Ajith Fernando.** This is why and how the earliest church devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to **fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and prayer. Will you seek community with others? This is God's plan and design for your life.

Hypocrisy is not the only barrier to authentic relationships. Another major obstacle in your life is what we call in football terms, **"the stiff-arm."** The stiff-arm is particularly effective because its force is applied down the length of a straight arm, directly into the shoulder. As such, the force that can be applied by a **stiff-arm fend can easily repel or topple an oncoming defender.** **If you keep others at arm's length, you are limiting your spiritual growth.** Whitewashing = stay away! **Authentic relationships give life.** True community has a way of exposing your masks and calling you to repentance, and growth in righteousness.

This is why we believe so strongly in small groups. We have some amazing leaders and awesome groups for all ages and life stages. I am going to ask today that if you are not involved in a small group, give us a year and see if you grow in authentic relationships with others and with Jesus Christ.

What would happen if the church was the most authentic group of people that St. Clair County had ever seen? [Play pad into response](#)

Response

It's ok not to be ok. It is not ok to cover it up and stay that way

You will never grow in relationship with others unless you put down your mask. Who are you bringing life to? **"I want to go and pray for you when you kneel at the alter sometime." GO!**

You will never begin a relationship with Jesus until you put down your mask. When you put down your mask you find life. You don't have to fake it before God, He knows!

Now that you have heard this good news, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to him using words like this:

*Jesus today I **recognize** it is because of my (sin) bad actions that I need you.*

*I **believe** Christ came to live, die and was raised from the death—to rescue me from my sin.*

***Forgive** me. I turn from me and put my trust in You.*

*Know that Jesus is Lord and King of all and I will **follow** Him.*

Notes

Authenticity= genuine, accurate or reliable

Matt. 23:27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity.

Woe = an interjection of grief or denunciation

Jesus employs the common Old Testament form of a woe (cf., e.g., Num 21:29; 1 Sam 4:8; Isa 3:9–11; Jer 13:27; Ezek 24:6–9)—an exclamation of “how greatly one will suffer,” mingling doom with pity.

Seven woes, probably a complete number (cf. v. 32), now follow (on the concept of “woe” see comments under 11:20–24). Verses 33–36 may be separable from the seventh woe and seem to provide a conclusion for the whole section. As elsewhere, “hypocrisy” may mean either insincerity or inconsistency, witting or unwitting. Given human nature, most hypocrites probably combine elements of all. On the repeated references to the “teachers of the law and Pharisees,” see comments under v. 1. Of several suggestions concerning the structure of the seven woes, probably the best is to see a 2+2+2+1 pattern (three pairs plus a concluding climax).

Hypocrite

υἱ ἰποκρίθ/β, οὐβ μ: (derivative of υἱ ἰποκριθ=nomai ‘to pretend,’ 88.227) **one who pretends to be other than he really is** — ‘hypocrite, **pretender**, one who acts hypocritically.’ οὐτάν δεκ νηστευ/hte, μη\ gi=nesqe wβ oi° υἱ ἰποκριται« skuqrwpoi÷ ‘when you fast, do not put on a sad face like the hypocrites’ Mt 6:16.

Often used during the Greek theatre to describe the one who wore a mask and pretended to be another character.

The leaders looked holy on the outside, luring people into their confidence. But they were actually a deadly trap, because their true status (“inside”) was that of unrighteousness and uncleanness. And anyone who followed them would be defiled by the association, just as a person is made unclean by a cup with a filthy interior or by contact with a dead body (Num. 19:11).

Whitewashed = to cover with lime, plaster, white wash

Over the centuries, the lime, once used to mask the smell of the bodies as they decomposed, hardened into a shell that enveloped the skeletons and the soil that surrounded them.

Whited sepulchres (τάφοις κεκονιαμένοις). Not the rock-tombs, belonging mostly to the rich, but the graves covered with plastered structures. In general, cemeteries were outside of cities; but any dead body found in the field was to be buried on the spot where it had been discovered. A pilgrim to the Passover, for instance, might easily come upon such a grave in his journey, and contract uncleanness by the contact (Num. 19:16). It was therefore ordered that all sepulchres should be whitewashed a month before Passover, in order to make them conspicuous, so that travellers might avoid ceremonial defilement. The fact that this general whitewashing was going on at the time when Jesus administered this rebuke to the Pharisees gave point to the comparison. The word κεκονιαμένοις (*whitened*, from κόνις, *dust*) carries the idea of whitening with a *powder*, as *powdered lime*.

23:27–28. Nothing spread ritual impurity as severely as a corpse (it made anyone who touched it unclean for a week—Num 19:11); Pharisees believed that one contracted impurity if even one's shadow touched a corpse or grave. Inconspicuous tombs (or limestone ossuaries) would be whitewashed each spring before Passover to warn passersby to avoid them and so avoid impurity; the Pharisees either lacked this telltale warning (Lk 11:44) or pretended that it was a mark of distinction rather than evidence of impurity. "Whitewash" probably alludes to Ezekiel 13:10–12 and 22:28; it may have covered over a wall's weakness but would not stop its collapse.

Beautiful

In the right season; beautifully timeline

Jesus' challenge (23:26) to the hypocritical leaders was to begin house-cleaning on the inside, confronting the sinful attitudes of their hearts. If the inner person is righteous, righteousness will flow out, resulting in outward righteousness as well.

28 In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

23:27–28 The sixth woe completes a third pair. It makes the same point as the previous woe, only via the metaphor of beautiful tombstones in cemeteries, so incongruous in view of the death they mask. For other Jews tombs also epitomized ritual impurity. “Wickedness” is, literally, *lawlessness*. These who claim expertise and faithfulness in the law actually contravene it. Compare Paul’s rebuke of Ananias in Acts 23:3 (for which v. 5 is probably not a retraction or apology but ironic commentary).

Psa. 35:13 Yet when they were sick,
my clothing was sackcloth;
I humbled myself with fasting,
and my prayer was **genuine**.

Prov. 11:19 **Genuine** righteousness leads to life,
but pursuing evil leads to death.

Luke 16:11 So if you have not been faithful with worldly wealth, who will trust you with what is **genuine**?

1Tim. 5:16 If any believing woman has widows in her family, let her help them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it can help widows in **genuine** need.

Scientific American magazine reports a lot of confusion and disagreement as to exactly what is genuine authenticity. We are taught to be ourselves and to get in touch with our "real self." In recent years a science of authenticity has arisen in order to discover what the authentic self truly is. As *Scientific American* reports it “Turns out, authenticity is a real mess.”

The writer asks the perplexing questions:

- Are you being most authentic when you are being consistent with your emotions?
- Or are you being most authentic when you are consistent with your beliefs?

- Which is the real authenticity? Was it the time you really gave that waiter a piece of your mind? Or that time you didn't tell the waiter how you really felt about their dismal performance because you value kindness?

The famous psychotherapist Carl Rogers observed that many people are asking "Who am I, really?" The latest research finds that ... many people report authenticity when they ... express compassion toward others or are living for something bigger than themselves.

Many products are designed to imitate the real thing. There is plastic decking that looks like real wood. Vinyl flooring that appears to be ceramic tile or ceramic tile that looks like wood. You can purchase fake fur or jewelry, phony noses, hairpieces, and other body parts. The purpose behind all of these items is fairly obvious, but what about a can of *Spray-on Mud from England*?

Spray-on Mud is designed for use on the outside of your SUV. That way it appears you use your expensive gas-guzzler for more than taking the kids to soccer practice. Spray it on and friends might think you've just returned from a wilderness adventure.

Sales of the product are going well, particularly in America, and in London where the concept originated. "If they want an authentic look," says inventor Colin Dowse, "There's not a lot else they can do. There's not a lot of mud in Chelsea." Apparently, \$15 a can seems a reasonable price for the appearance of authenticity.

There are many expressions of imitation Christianity that we can try to pass off as the real thing. Good wishes can be mistaken for prayer. Success can be misconstrued as spiritual achievement. Inspirational bumper stickers and symbols can be seen as evangelism. Excellent music can cover for authentic worship of the heart. Humorous or emotional stories can pass for inspired preaching. Christian clichés can be handed out as biblical wisdom. An attractive personality can be mistaken for a Spirit-filled life.

The real thing? Easy. It looks like Jesus!

Jon Mutchler, Ferndale, Washington; source: Ian Sample, "Spray-on Mud: the Ultimate Accessory for City 4x4 Drivers," www.guardian.co.uk (6-14-05)