

Series: Words & Deeds Part 2: “Really! They Are Life Changing”
“Authority and Hypocrisy”
Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32
Psalm 25:1-9
Philippians 2:1-13
Matthew 21:23-32

Connecting with those in need in all aspects of one’s Life Wallet is essential. “Be the best Jesus!” is the theme for the 2024 Generosity Campaign. My friends, we need Jesus in such a time as this. Quoting Ruling Elder John Pomery, a member of the Generosity Service Team, “Because of our previous overspending and use of one-time assets, even with one pastor and some trimming of other staff expenses, we need as far as possible to maintain (or increase) our current level of financial giving.”¹ Philippians 2:5 reads, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” My friends, we need the mind of Christ in these dark times in our world, nation, state, and congregation.

Today begins my last Generosity Campaign with you. I am retiring on December 31st. Pastor Ryan begins as our Bridge Pastor on January 1st. God is with us in these dark times. And darkness never has the last word. Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University writes,

When I was a student at Harvard Divinity School, I learned preaching from Dr. Gardner Taylor, a pastor in New York City. I’ll never forget those lectures. I remember him telling us a story from when he was preaching in Louisiana during the Depression. Electricity was just coming into that part of the country, and he was out in a rural, black church that had just one little light bulb hanging down from the ceiling to light up the whole sanctuary. He was preaching away, and in the middle of his sermon, all of a sudden, the electricity went out. The building went pitch black, and Dr. Taylor didn’t know what to say, being a young preacher. He stumbled around until one of the elderly deacons sitting in the back of the church cried out, “Preach on, preacher! We can still see Jesus in the dark!” Sometimes that’s the only time we can see him—in the dark. And the

¹Source is Ruling Elder John Pomery.

good news of the gospel is that whether we can see him in the dark or not, he can see us in the dark.²

Due to our sin nature, which is always being redeemed, we must never forget our desperate need for God. Jesus has the authority to lead God's people. Religious leaders of his days and even ours make use of hypocrisy for their own ends. And we as followers of Jesus do the same.

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32, Psalm 25:1-9, Philippians 2:1-13, and Matthew 21:23-32 make this point for our consideration: God has intimate knowledge of each one of us. Thus, God makes choices to deliver, provide, and journey with us in all circumstances.

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 builds this plank into God's intimate knowledge of choosing to deliver, provide, and journey with us in all circumstances. In the unsettledness of life, those times when we believe God to be absent, prayers of protest and repentance have their place in the Christian life. Ezekiel 18:28-29 reads, "Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.' O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?" It is the people of God's hypocrisy that makes the authority of God questioned. Yet, with honest reflection about who is fair, the people come around to God. God's love pierces through the darkness with light.

Psalm 25:1-9 builds this plank into God's intimate knowledge of choosing to deliver, provide, and journey with us in all circumstances. Instead of living for self, depending on oneself, seeking instant gratification, followers of God are to offer their life to God, depend on God in trust, and be content to wait on God. Psalm 25:1-2 read, "To you O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly

²Taken from Timothy George's sermon "Unseen Footprints," *PreachingToday Audio* (Issue 290).

treacherous.” It is the people of God’s hypocrisy that makes the authority of God questioned. Yet, with honest reflection about the difference between being self-serving and offering oneself to God; the difference between depending on oneself and depending on God in trust; and seeking instant gratification and being content to wait on God, the people of God come around to God. God’s love pierces through the darkness with light.

Philippians 2:1-13 builds this plank into God’s intimate knowledge of choosing to deliver, provide, and journey with us in all circumstances. It is important to work out one’s salvation with fear and trembling as well as with humility. Philippians 2:1-4 reads,

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

It is the people of God’s hypocrisy that makes the authority of God questioned. What does “having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” look like? It looks like living a life with awe of and respect for God in all humility. God’s love pierces through the darkness with light.

Matthew 21:23-32 builds this plank into God’s intimate knowledge of choosing to deliver, provide, and journey with us in all circumstances. Christ is given authority in and through humility. Jesus is also prophet and King. It is in humility that Jesus is sovereign, that is in control of all things, and prophet, that is the truth teller speaking into hypocrisy. Matthew 21:23-27 reads,

...the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him [Jesus], and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you the authority?”...Jesus said to them, “Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” And they argued with one another, “If we say, from heaven, he will say to us, why then did you not believe him? But if we say, of human origin, we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.” So they answered Jesus, “we do not know.”

Hypocrisy did the chief priests and the elders in. Jesus did not give an answer but demonstrated love. God's love pierces through the darkness with light.³

One must be aware of words and deeds that can plant seeds of God's love in others' lives. Rob Bell, the author of *Love Wins* writes, "How great is God? Great enough to achieve what God sets out to do, or kind of great, medium great, great most of the time...God has a purpose, something God is doing in the world, something that has never changed, something that involves everybody, and God's intention all along has been to communicate this intention clearly."⁴ God is always for us and never against us.

Be generous with your Life Wallet. Have the mind of Christ. Be the best Jesus in such a time as this. Cry out to God in in the darkness. God's love pierces through the darkness with light. Amen!

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 1 October 2023 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh
at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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³In the five paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Anatheia E. Portier-Young, Pamela J. Scalise, Donna Giver-Johnston, Cynthia A. Jarvis, Elizabeth M. Bounds, Whitney Bodman, and Shawnthea Monroe in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 334-336, 336-339, 340-342, 343-345, 345-347, 348-350, and 350-352.

⁴Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York, New York: HarperOne, 2011), 97-98.