

“SHOW BUSINESS”

**A SERMON BASED ON MATTHEW’S GOSPEL (23:1:12)
AND PRESENTED AT ORLEAN UMC ON NOVEMBER 2,
2014**

**IF I SHOULD ASK YOU FOR ADJECTIVES
DESCRIBING JESUS, I’M ALMOST CERTAIN I’D
GET SUCH WORDS AS *KIND, LOVING,
FORGIVING, PATIENT, GENTLE..... ALL OF
THESE ANSWERS ARE CORRECT. BUT IF YOU
READ THE NEW TESTAMENT CAREFULLY,
YOU’LL COME UP WITH SOME OTHER WORDS —
WORDS LIKE *IMPATIENT, ANGRY, AND
PERHAPS EVEN *DISGUSTED..... NOW THE
QUESTION IS, WHAT OR WHO BROUGHT OUT
THESE NEGATIVE FEELINGS IN JESUS?*****

OUR GOSPEL LESSON FOR TODAY GIVES AN ANSWER..... JESUS IS TEACHING IN JERUSALEM.... THIS MEANS THAT RELIGIOUS LEADERS ARE EVERYWHERE: THE PEOPLE THE NEW TESTAMENT SO OFTEN REFERS TO AS "THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES." -----

THESE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES WERE TRYING FEVERISHLY TO DISCREDIT JESUS BY ASKING QUESTIONS THEY FELT MIGHT PUT HIM ON THE SPOT..... BUT JESUS HAD JUST TURNED THE TABLES BY ASKING THESE SAME MEN A QUESTION THEY COULDN'T ANSWER. IT WAS TRULY A HUMILIATING MOMENT FOR MEN OF DIGNITY AND POSITION.....SUCH AS THESE

**NOW IT'S ALMOST AS IF JESUS IS SORRY FOR
WHAT HE HAS DONE..... NOW WHAT HE
HAD DONE WAS RIGHT AND PROPER, MIND
YOU, BUT IT COULD HAVE BAD FALLOUT,
BECAUSE IT MIGHT DIMINISH THE AUTHORITY
OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS.....**

**SO JESUS SAID, "THE SCRIBES AND
PHARISEES HAVE AUTHORITY; THEY SIT ON
MOSES' SEAT..... FOR THAT REASON, YOU
OUGHT TO LISTEN TO THEM, AND FOLLOW
THEIR TEACHINGS."**

WITH THESE WORDS, JESUS ENDORSED THE OFFICE AND AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES..... BUT HE DIDN'T STOP THERE. HE NOW PROCEEDED TO CONDEMN THE WAY THESE MEN ACTUALLY LIVED, BECAUSE THE WAY THEY LIVED WAS IN VIVID CONTRAST TO THEIR TEACHING..... AND IN WHAT HE SAID, JESUS DEMONSTRATED THAT HE WAS, INDEED, ANGRY, IMPATIENT AND DISGUSTED.

"DON'T DO AS THEY DO," JESUS SAID, "BECAUSE THEY DON'T PRACTICE WHAT THEY PREACH."

**THEY WERE PUTTING BURDENS ON THE
PEOPLE..... THE REGULATIONS THEY HAD
BUILT INTO RELIGION WERE ALMOST
IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANYONE TO FULFILL UNLESS
THEY WORKED AT IT FULL TIME, THE WAY THE
SCRIBES AND PHARISEES WERE PAID TO DO.
INSTEAD OF HELPING THE PEOPLE FIND GOD,
THEY WERE PUTTING GOD OUT OF REACH.**

**THEN JESUS SPOKE SPECIFICALLY OF THE
WAY THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES
PRACTICED THEIR RELIGION. "THEY MAKE
THEIR PHYLACTERIES BROAD AND THEIR
FRINGES LONG."**

**THE PHYLACTERIES WERE LITTLE LEATHER
BOXES THAT DEVOUT JEWS WORE ON THEIR
WRIST AND FOREHEAD — LITTLE BOXES THAT
CONTAINED KEY VERSES OF SCRIPTURE.....
TO WEAR SUCH A BOX WAS A PROPER ACT OF
RELIGIOUS DEVOTION..... IT MIGHT BE
COMPARED WITH THE WAY SOME PEOPLE
TODAY WEAR A CROSS..... I'M NOT SPEAKING
OF THOSE WHO CONSIDER THE CROSS SIMPLY
TO BE A PIECE OF JEWELRY, WHICH SADDENS
ME TO NO END, -----BUT THOSE WHO WEAR IT
AS AN EXPRESSION OF THEIR FAITH..... BUT
THESE MEN WORE *LARGE* BOXES, TO DRAW
ATTENTION TO THEMSELVES.**

**YOU WERE LIKELY TO SEE THE BOX BEFORE
YOU SAW THE MAN! -----SO, TOO, WITH THE
TASSELS..... THESE WERE SUPPOSED TO
REMIND FAITHFUL JEWS OF THE
COMMANDMENTS OF GOD..... THEY WERE A
PROPER PART OF A JEWISH GARMENT. BUT
THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES WORE
DRAMATIC, OSTENTATIOUS TASSELS — NOT
TO REMIND THEMSELVES OF THE
COMMANDMENTS, BUT TO IMPRESS OTHER
PEOPLE THAT THEY WERE WEARING THEM.**

**AND THERE'S MORE..... JESUS SAID, IN
DISGUST, THAT THESE PEOPLE "*LOVE TO HAVE
THE PLACE OF HONOR AT BANQUETS AND THE
BEST SEATS IN THE SYNAGOGUES.*" *THEY
LOVED TO BE GREETED WITH RESPECT, AND
TO HAVE PEOPLE CALL THEM BY THEIR TITLES,
PAYING THEM SPECIAL HONOR.***

**NOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS?---- WHY IS
JESUS SO UPSET? YOU AND I KNOW PEOPLE
LIKE THIS, PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO GET
ATTENTION, AND WHO DELIGHT IN WHATEVER
HONORS THEY'VE BEEN PAID..... THEY'RE
GENERALLY HARMLESS, EVEN IF THEY GET
AWFULLY TIRESOME.**

**WE WRITE THEM OFF AS HAVING AN EGO
PROBLEM, BUT THINK LITTLE MORE ABOUT IT.
WHY IS JESUS SO TROUBLED BY THEIR
CONDUCT?**

**THE ANSWER IS EASIEST TO UNDERSTAND, I
THINK, IN THE WAY THE *REVISED ENGLISH
BIBLE* TRANSLATES JESUS' WORDS.**

***"WHATEVER THEY DO IS DONE FOR SHOW"*
(MATTHEW 23:5, REB). -----THE SCRIBES AND
PHARISEES WEREN'T INTO RELIGION. THEY
WERE IN SHOW BUSINESS! ----**

**THEY WERE USING GOD AND RELIGION JUST
TO IMPRESS PEOPLE..... THEIR RELIGION WAS
NOTHING MORE THAN A PERFORMANCE. SHOW
BUSINESS!**

**THIS IS INTERESTING, BECAUSE THE NEW
TESTAMENT WORD FOR *HYPOCRITE* COMES
FROM AN ANCIENT GREEK WORD MEANING
ACTOR..... A HYPOCRITE IS SOMEONE WHO'S
PLAYING A PART. THE HYPOCRITE ISN'T REAL;
HE OR SHE IS SIMPLY PUTTING ON A
PERFORMANCE..... A HYPOCRITE IS *USING*
RELIGION.**

**SEE WHAT THESE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES
WERE DOING..... THEY WERE TAKING THE
SYMBOLS OF RELIGION — IN THEIR CASE,
PHYLACTERIES AND TASSELS — AND WERE
WEARING THEM..... NOT TO HONOR GOD.....
BUT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THEMSELVES.
IT'S LIKE SOMEONE TAKING A DATE TO A
SOCIAL OCCASION, NOT BECAUSE THEY WANT
TO ENJOY THE PERSON'S COMPANY OR TO
GIVE THEIR COMPANION PLEASURE, BUT IN
ORDER TO IMPRESS SOME PERSON AT THE
EVENT.**

WHEN SOMEONE DOES SUCH A THING IN
SOCIAL LIFE, MOST OF US FIND IT
CONTEMPTIBLE. THINK HOW IT PLAYS OUT,
THEN, WHEN THE "PERSON" IN QUESTION IS
GOD! WE TAKE GOD AS AN ACT, SOMETHING
TO SHOW OFF, IN ORDER TO IMPRESS OTHER
PEOPLE! AND IN THE PROCESS, TO DRAW
ATTENTION TO OURSELVES.

HOW ABSURD THIS IS! -----THE ONLY ONE IN
THIS UNIVERSE REALLY WORTH IMPRESSING IS
GOD. WHAT KIND OF DISTORTED VALUES
WOULD MAKE SOMEONE USE GOD IN ORDER

TO IMPRESS PEOPLE?

**IT'S EASY TO SEE THAT SUCH A PERSON HAS
NO REMOTE IDEA OF WHO GOD IS. THE VALUES
OF SUCH A PERSON HAVE TO BE COMPLETELY
OUT OF ORDER.**

**NOW I'D BETTER PAUSE MOMENTARILY TO
ACKNOWLEDGE HOW THIS SCRIPTURE
APPLIES SPECIFICALLY TO SOMEONE LIKE ME,
WHO IN SOME CIRCLES MIGHT BE THOUGHT OF
AS A RELIGIOUS LEADER..... JESUS SPEAKS
EMPHATICALLY ABOUT RELIGIOUS LEADERS
WHO GLORY IN THEIR TITLES, AND WHO
DELIGHT IN GETTING THE BEST SEATS AT**

SPECIAL OCCASIONS.

**ONE VETERAN AND WISE CLERGY PERSON
TELLS THE STORY OF HOW MUCH HE
RELISHED HIS EXPERIENCE AS A YOUNG
PASTOR..... HIS CHURCH WAS IN A TOWN SO
SMALL THAT YOU WENT TO THE POST OFFICE
TO PICK UP YOUR MAIL EACH MORNING..... HE
SAID HE LOVED THAT TRIP EACH DAY,
BECAUSE ALL ALONG THE WAY PEOPLE WERE
SAYING, "GOOD MORNING, PASTOR!"-----
"HOWDY, REVEREND!" -----IT WAS 15 MINUTES
OF BEING A CELEBRITY, ONCE A DAY! -----**

AND IF THERE WAS A BANQUET OR ANY SORT OF SPECIAL EVENT IN HIS TOWN, ODDS WERE GOOD THAT HE'D BE SITTING AT THE SPEAKER'S TABLE, BECAUSE HE'D BE OFFERING THE TABLE GRACE OR THE BENEDICTION..... SLOWLY IT DAWNED ON HIM THAT HE WAS THE VERY KIND OF PERSON JESUS HAD IN MIND IN TODAY'S TEXT.

MIND YOU, HE DIDN'T MEAN TO BE LIKE THIS. BUT THAT'S HOW SUBTLE SIN IS — ESPECIALLY A SIN LIKE PRIDE. HE CAME TO REALIZE THAT HIS RELIGION HAD BECOME

SHOW BUSINESS.

**AND OF COURSE THIS IS A PROBLEM FOR ALL
OF US, LAYPERSONS OR CLERGY..... WE CAN
SO EASILY ----SO VERY EASILY ----MAKE OUR
RELIGION INTO A SHOW.....**

**WHEN ELLSWORTH KALAS, A UNITED
METHODIST MINISTER AND POPULAR
CHRISTIAN AUTHOR, BECAME PASTOR OF A
RATHER LARGE SUBURBAN CHURCH..... HE
WANTED TO LEARN EVERYTHING POSSIBLE
ABOUT HIS PARISH, SO HE ARRANGED TO
HAVE LUNCH WITH A MAN WHO POSSESSED A**

GOOD DEAL OF INSIGHT.

**HE ASKED THE MAN THE BIGGEST PROBLEM
THEY FACED IN THEIR CHURCH.**

**"JUST THIS," THE MAN ANSWERED. "THE
CHURCH OF THE SAVIOUR IS A GOOD CHURCH
ADDRESS..... PEOPLE WHO MOVE INTO OUR
SIDE OF THE CITY ARE LOOKING FOR THE BEST
COUNTRY CLUB..... THE BEST PRIVATE
SCHOOL FOR THEIR CHILDREN, AND THE BEST
CHURCH ADDRESS..... SOME OF THEM HAVE
NO INTEREST IN GOD WHATSOEVER..... THEY
JUST WANT A GOOD CHURCH ADDRESS, AND
WE PROVIDE IT."**

**WELL, THAT'S SHOW BUSINESS! THAT'S USING
GOD AND RELIGION TO IMPRESS PEOPLE.**

**DO YOU REMEMBER THAT ONE OF THE TEN
COMMANDMENTS SAYS THAT WE MUST NOT
TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD IN VAIN? -----
BIBLE STUDENTS SAY THERE ARE SEVERAL
WAYS WE CAN TAKE GOD'S NAME IN VAIN. ONE
IS TO SWEAR A COURT OATH AND THEN LIE.
ANOTHER IS TO USE GOD'S NAME IN
PROFANITY..... AND ANOTHER, I'M VERY SURE,
IS TO USE RELIGION TO DRAW ATTENTION TO**

OURSELVES.

**IF IT'S BLASPHEMY TO USE GOD'S NAME
CARELESSLY, ISN'T IT ALSO BLASPHEMY TO
USE ANY ACT OF CHRISTIAN DEVOTION FOR
ANY PURPOSE OTHER THAN TO BRING HONOR
TO GOD?**

**THAT IS — IF I GIVE TO IMPRESS PEOPLE, OR IF
I MAKE A SHOW OF MY KNOWLEDGE OF THE
BIBLE, OR IF I SEEK ATTENTION FOR THE
KINDNESS I SHOW TO A SHUT-IN..... IS IT
POSSIBLE THAT I'M BEING GUILTY OF A KIND
OF BLASPHEMY? COULD IT BE THAT I AM
USING THE THINGS OF GOD, NOT TO GLORIFY**

GOD, BUT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO MYSELF?

**ISN'T IT FRIGHTENING TO THINK WE COULD
USE SOMETHING SO GOOD AND SO HOLY FOR
SUCH AN UNHOLY PURPOSE? -----ISN'T IT
ASTONISHING THAT WE MIGHT *USE* THE
ALMIGHTY GOD OF THE UNIVERSE TO IMPRESS
SOMEONE — AND TO BE HONEST, MAYBE
SOMEONE WE DON'T EVEN PARTICULARLY
LIKE?**

THAT'S ASTONISHING, ISN'T IT!

SO IS OUR SITUATION HOPELESS? WHAT I'VE SAID MAY MAKE US WONDER HOW WE CAN EVER WORSHIP IN A WAY THAT PLEASES GOD — OR HOW WE CAN HOPE TO LIVE AS GOD EXPECTS US TO..... WHAT IS THE SECRET?

IT'S REALLY VERY SIMPLE. THE 19TH-CENTURY DANISH PHILOSOPHER, SOREN KIERKEGAARD, REMINDED US THAT IN A CHURCH SERVICE, YOU AND I ARE THE ACTORS, AND GOD IS THE AUDIENCE.

THE PREACHER, THE CHOIR, THE LITURGISTS,
THE PRAISE BAND, THE ORGANIST — AND
THOSE OF US JUST SITTING IN THE PEWS —
WE'RE ON STAGE, AND GOD IS WATCHING. GOD
IS THE AUDIENCE.

AND SO, TOO, WITH ALL THE ROUTINE LIVING
OF OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES..... GOD IS THE
AUDIENCE. THAT'S ALL WE NEED TO KNOW.....
IF WE REMEMBER WHO THE AUDIENCE IS, OUR
"SHOW BUSINESS" WILL BECOME
MAGNIFICENT WORSHIP AND MAGNIFICENT
LIVING..... AND GOD WILL APPLAUD.

PRAISE GOD.....AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU

AND FOR ME

AMEN
