

It's getting harder and harder, to know what's real...

- Fake news;
- Doctored photos (is the thing this week);
- internet scams;
- They're even making fake meat now (I'm not sure why you'd bother when the real stuff's so good)

I've given today's message the title, "**Genuine** Faith Runs Deep"...

And we're going to be comparing "Genuine Faith", and the depths of Genuine Faith, with something (which is much more shallow) – something that we may refer to as "Faith", but when it comes under pressure, we realise, "It was only ever pretend"...

So, let's set the scene:

We've been working our way through the Gospel of Luke. Over the last 2 weeks, we've heard how Jesus has been absolutely scathing of the religious leaders – the Pharisees, and the Scribes (religious Lawyers)... And it ended up last week as, "They've basically got the knives-out to 'get' Jesus... They are now poking-the-bear – they're pushing/provoking/throwing all these questions at Jesus, to try and catch Him out in something He might say..."

But even as they're trying to catch Jesus out, the crowds coming to hear Jesus, have grown enormously... I suspect what's going on, is we Aussies, we're not the only ones who like to see a tall-poppy getting cut down... And probably the

most relished character demolition, is when it happens to a **Religious Leader** – People love that, don't they...

And maybe that's what's going on. Jesus told-off the Scribes and the Pharisees, and the crowds, – it seems like they warmed to that... There's now **thousands** of people, gathering to see this Jesus bloke – so many, they were trampling one another....

But Jesus knew it wouldn't last... You see, most of these folk didn't have genuine faith... And if this is the first-ever mega-church, within a matter of months, Jesus had pruned it down to "the faithful". He's taken it from a gathering of thousands, to a few women at the foot of the cross, and few men, watching from afar....

And so Jesus said to His Disciples: **Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**

"Leaven", is an interesting Metaphor. I like leaven... I love bread, and bread dough, needs leaven to make it rise... Now, the thing is, for us, (we've got a bread-maker). And the leaven is "dried yeast". We keep it in the fridge, it's in a little alfoil sort of a packet, and you get a little tea-spoon of these pure beige granules...

But back in the day (Jesus' day), leaven was a piece of old mouldy bread dough. You'd go to your leaven jar, and pull off a piece of this old mouldy bread, and you'd work it through the whole batch of dough...

And the thing is, the leaven begins doing its thing straight away, but it takes a while for you to notice it. And that little bit of leaven, affects the whole loaf... The fungus that causes it to rise, is growing and multiplying, in the whole loaf, and changing the nature of the loaf (the loaf is rising). The bubbles it forms, that makes the loaf to rise, is the gas it produces as it transpires, because that's what a living thing does...

And this is where the metaphor's limited, right, because we **want** the bread to rise...

But when Jesus used this metaphor, it was an illustration of "sin"... The fungus – that little piece of mouldy bread, starts growing within the dough... And that's one of the reasons that at the Passover, one of the rules was "for there to be no leaven in the house" – it's a symbol of sin...

And Jesus is saying: **Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**

Leaven transforms the dough – it is slow; insidious; constant process... And that's what hypocrisy is like.

No one likes a hypocrite, but what is hypocrisy??? We generally think of a hypocrite, as someone who says one thing, and does the other... Or, they point the finger at you, while they're doing that same thing themselves...

But, hypocrisy can be much more than that... The Greek word, describes an actor in the theatre – he puts a mask on his face, and plays the part of the character in a play.... And so, being a hypocrite, is wearing a mask (as it were) – it’s pretending to be something, that is not genuine...

Now, the Pharisees – they were masters at hypocrisy. And hypocrisy is an insidious thing – we introduce a little bit – a little bit of mask-wearing, works its way through the whole church...

And that, is why “hypocrisy” is such an obscene thing... As Disciples of Jesus, we should be filled with truth and righteousness – we’re meant to be the real deal – not a bunch of people who wear a mask – playing a part...

You see, there **is** going to come a time, when everybody is going to be unmasked – and nothing’s going to be hidden. And of course, that’s when Jesus returns on the Day of Judgment.

Some of us will squirm in our seats more than others (at that prospect)... Everything that is hidden, is going to come out in the open... The privacy settings on your internet browser – all that history you thought you’d cleared – it will all come out in the open... Routing everything through a series of Virtual Private Networks – that won’t keep you anonymous... Everything you’ve said (in the most private place) – everything’s going to come to light...

Everything good you've done: That will be known. And everything you've tried to keep hidden, that will be known too...

If you have ever been in any doubt as to whether you need a Saviour or not, just ask yourself, "How ashamed will I be, if everything I've done or said in private, is revealed for the whole world to see?" ... That's why I need a Saviour...

Anyway:

I ummed and arred for a while, as to how much to break this Bible reading up. My Bible put it under 3 separate headings:

- Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees;
- Have no fear;
- Acknowledge Christ before men.

And I could've easily gotten 3 sermons out of this – 3 separate topics... But Jesus didn't put those breaks in it – those are human headings. Jesus just started speaking and kept on speaking – it's all tied together...

And as such, the warning to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (hypocrisy), actually plays a part through this whole section.

It begins in the context of the crowds... And I'll let you in on a little secret: *"It's a very real temptation for a preacher to put on a mask and be something that is not genuine, if that image, is going to appeal to the crowds and keep the crowds."*

And let me tell you, if hypocrisy is wearing a mask, to present ourselves as something that we are not, “Social Media” would have to be the fermentation vessel of hypocrisy (in the extreme) – people pretending to be who they are not:

- children, pretending to be adults;
- old people, pretending to be young;
- sad people, pretending to be happy;
- it’s the photoshopping and photo manipulation capital of those who want to look different...
- and the spin-doctor’s paradise...

Could there be anything more false than what we see on social media???

And yet the crowds lap it up...

And we even see this sort of hypocrisy coming through in the church... Church leaders and church organisations, marketing themselves, to present an image that is not genuine – they wear a mask...

Hypocrisy (or the lack of it), is a matter of the heart. It always is.

And the Holy Spirit within – He is the **guard** to hypocrisy... The Holy Spirit, grows the fruit **of** the Spirit. We are being sanctified, to become more and more like Christ.

And so, we don’t need to put on a mask of:

- being merciful, because our hearts are filled with mercy.
- graciousness, because our hearts are filled with grace.
- loving others, because we genuinely do...

- faith, because our hearts are filled with genuine faith...

And I threw in that last example (of faith) because (although Jesus doesn't use the word "faith") He moves on to talk about what genuine faithfulness looks like... And it's probably not the picture of faith many churches are presented with today...

Jesus is talking about faith (and faithfulness) that endures persecution...

V⁴ "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵ But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!

For some, their "hypocrisy" is their faith itself – they wear a mask of faith, that isn't genuine... It masquerades as faith, but it's not a faithfulness that will endure to the end...

You see, the sort of faith that Jesus is describing, is a faith that takes precedence above all other things.

Jesus said: "**I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body** because that's all they can do... Don't fear for your life – not because your life will be spared – but because of what comes next (when you are killed)... When a Christian is killed, they go straight to be with the Lord, and **wowers**: what a blessing that is...

But for many, the end of **this** life – they fear that, as the ultimate disaster that could befall them... Why are our elderly (even Christians) trying so hard, and spending hundreds of thousands of dollars, to try and scrape another month out of life??? It's because they fear death...

Jesus didn't say, "Don't be afraid – you're not going to be killed" – He said "Don't be afraid of those who **do** kill the body"... He's talking about persecution. And genuine faith means to continue to be faithful to Jesus, even at the threat of death.

As one reads the New Testament, one thing that is impossible to avoid, is the constant warnings, **and** the constant encouragements, preparing Christians for massive persecution... And yet sadly, we've become a generation who are **not** prepared for persecution...

Part of it is to do with theology. And by far, the most popular teaching around end times coming out of the USA today, is the belief that before the great tribulation (big trouble), Jesus is going to secretly come and suck all the Christians out of the world, and so they will be spared persecution... *It's a new teaching that's only become popular since the 1830's...*

Before that, the Christian church fully expected to go through a great period of tribulation before Jesus returns. Why would they believe that? Because that's what the Bible says, and that's what the teaching of Jesus and His Apostles prepare us for...

But another reason why Christians are not prepared for persecution, is because it's not good marketing, and so Pastors rarely teach it... *"Why would I want to become a Christian if I'm going to be persecuted???"*

And so the message more often given, might be:

"God has a wonderful plan and purpose for your life" ...

You've all heard that said??? It sounds pretty appealing...

You know what? – **It's true.** God **does** have a wonderful plan and purpose for your life....

And God's wonderful plan and purpose for your life, may include torture of you and your family, followed by suffering and death,,, all for the sake of the Name of Jesus.... That may all be part of God's wonderful plan and purpose for your life...

But, how could that possibly be wonderful? – It doesn't make sense, to a person, who's only hope, is **this** life...

But for Disciples of Jesus, it's very different. We are **not** afraid of those who can and **do** kill the body. Why not? Because that's the worst they can do. The worst they can do, is kill you... And that's not so bad, because our blessing comes after death.

So: no, we do **not** fear them – **we** fear God...

That's something our culture has lost – the fear of God...

Not many folk want to listen to a Fire & Brimstone preacher, and it's not normally my style,, But sometimes to accurately

explain what Jesus is saying, one has to be a Fire & Brimstone preacher...

It's not politically correct to talk about Hell, but Jesus had more to say about "Hell" than anyone else in the Bible.

The Greek word for "Hell" is γέενναν (*gehenna*). On the southern side of Jerusalem, there's a valley called *gēhinnōm*. It's a horrible place. There was a time in Israel's history when some turned away from God, and they sacrificed their children to the false god Molech... And that's where they did it – in the valley called *gēhinnōm* ...

And so that place was profaned – despised... By Jesus' day, it had become the rubbish dump of Israel – a place of constant smouldering fires, and where the dead bodies of executed criminals would be burned (along with the city's rubbish)... And so Gehenna, was the perfect name for the place of eternal punishment and torment (that we know as "Hell")...

But Christians need **not** be afraid, because we've been forgiven of our sins – we will not go to Hell...

And, the only one who has the power to send anyone to hell – we are oh so valuable to Him.

5 sparrows are worth 2 pennies. *I wouldn't give you 2 pennies for a dozen sparrows... They come into my vegie garden and rip it to shreds... And I'd like to poison them... If I did happen to poison them (not saying I do),,, not one of them will be forgotten by God....*

The point: God knows how many hairs you've got on your head... And you're much more valuable than any sparrow... What's Jesus saying? Don't be afraid of martyrdom – don't be afraid for being murdered for following Jesus – you're not going to slip through the cracks – you won't be forgotten by God... He takes those who are His, straight to glory...

Do you see what Jesus is showing us here? A **genuine** faith runs deep... A genuine faith isn't a shallow thing – it isn't something that's fixated on this life, or fixated on what blessings we might be able to achieve in this life – A genuine faith is about **faithfulness** – being faithful to Jesus to the end.

Here at BD, every week, we pray for the persecuted church. And part of what we pray, is that they would be faithful witnesses for Jesus (even as they suffer persecution)...

A few years ago, in some lands, many Christian towns, cities and villages came under severe persecution. ISIS would roll into their town, gather up all the Christians, and the choice that was put before them was very simple – “Deny Jesus and commit to Allah, or have your head cut off...”

What would you do??? What if they threatened to cut the heads off your children? Would you deny Jesus and commit to Allah??? For those Christians, this wasn't an academic question – What would you do???

Do we have the option of pretending??? With our words, saying that we denounce Jesus and commit to Allah, but in our hearts, we're really firm for Jesus???

Do we have that option??? Well, that's the difference, between genuine faith (that runs deep), and faith, that is merely a mask we wear... Are you with me??? Is your faith in Jesus, a preference, or a conviction? Is it genuine, or is it a mask???...

Jesus gives us the answer, you know:

⁸ "And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, ⁹ but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

Now, let's be clear here: He's not talking about getting up in a church where everybody loves Jesus, and fitting in with the crowd by saying, "Jesus – He's the man..." He's not talking about acknowledging Jesus in front of those who love Jesus...

He's talking about acknowledging Jesus, at the threat of life and limb... He's talking about acknowledging Jesus, while the half-blunt machete is sawing at your neck... Oh, how we've cheapened faith today...

Persecution can come from various sources. It can be a religious persecution, that comes from religious leaders (or other religions), and it can be a civil persecution, where Disciples of Jesus are arrested and charged and tried (and

found guilty) by the laws of the land. And we are now seeing the laws of our land, becoming increasingly incompatible with our Christian faith...

And as our Nation (and its laws) become increasingly anti-Christian, some Christians, get around this, by putting a mask on their faith, and pretending that their faith is something that is **completely** compatible, and affirming of our culture... It is not...

Jesus said: ¹¹ **And when they bring you before the synagogues**

(that's Religious persecution). BTW, did you notice He said "When" – not "If". **when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities** (That's persecution from the civil authorities) **do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say,** ¹² **for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."**

I've experienced this... Years ago, while I was still in Bible College, the denomination I was in, decided that it was OK to ordain unrepentant practicing homosexuals... And there was an uproar in the church – that the hierarchy would depart from Biblical teaching and come up with that... And there was a special Synod meeting in Brisbane to respond to this, and I went along...

And the whole thing was stage-managed... But it began by them saying, "We're going to have a time of sharing, And this

is a “safe place”. And so, everyone is able to speak without fear” ...

Anyway, I got up and spoke, and I told a true story of when we went canoeing, and we took the dog with us, and when we were at the river, the dog found a dead goanna and rolled in it. And how we had to scrub that dog clean before we could bear to have it in the car with us, to drive home... And that’s what the Assembly had done – it’s made this horrible decision, and for us to continue to journey together, it has to be scrubbed clean... Its stench is foul...

Apparently an official complaint was made, and I was hauled in to this little room to be “counselled” ... I had no idea what to say... But at exactly the right time, the words just came out...

The only reason you’re being counselled and not “disciplined”, is because you’re not yet subject to the Minister’s Code of Conduct...

They told me an official complaint had been made, and action would have to be taken, and the Holy Spirit just gave me the words....

“I’m sorry to hear that, because were told right at the beginning, that this was a safe place, where any person could speak without fear... And it seems it hasn’t been a safe place for me...”

How could they respond to that? they couldn’t. It was done...

And that wasn’t my clever words – that was the Holy Spirit – He provided the words to speak in defence – not me...

Alright, so don't be anxious when you are hauled up before the authorities and charged with a crime, because you've been a faithful Disciple of Jesus.

Righto: What part does "grace" play in this???

Jesus said,

- "Acknowledge me before men, and I will acknowledge you."
- "If you deny me, I will deny you in heaven"...

What about if we have let Jesus down??? Is it game over?
Too late? No...

We know that God is in the business of forgiving sins, don't we??? And we know that Peter denied Jesus – 3 times he denied Him... But there was repentance and the forgiveness of sins. And Peter (in the strength of the Holy Spirit) went on, to die, rather than to deny Jesus again...

I think that's what Jesus was talking about in V10. **everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven,**

Yeah? When we repent of sin – even our rejection of Jesus – when we repent of that, we are forgiven. Look at Saul (once he was born again, he became the Apostle Paul) – He hated Jesus... He hunted down Christians to arrest them, and send them back to Jerusalem for punishment... But when Saul met

Jesus and repented, he was forgiven... - never to deny Jesus again...

But there is one sin, which is **unforgivable** – **but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.** What does that mean???

I'll tell you what it means: It's a picture of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees... They could not be saved. Why couldn't they be saved? Because they claimed to be close to God, but they did not recognise the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ...

The only way a person can be saved, is to surrender to Jesus as their Lord... And so, it becomes a statement of logic... If I reject the saving activity of God in Christ Jesus, I can't be saved/forgiven. Why not? Because I'm rejecting it...

But if I **embrace** the saving work of the Spirit, my sins (indeed) shall be forgiven...

So: Faith; Faithfulness.... Genuine faith, runs deep...

Do we have a genuine faith? Or is our faith a mask we wear? – something we slip off and on, and change to fit the mood of the situation???

Be prepared for persecution. A genuine faith, is what will keep us strong, because even if they kill us, we don't escape God's attention. He has us... And our glory isn't in this world – it's in the Kingdom to come.

And so, my prayer, is that we would be a people who are never ashamed of Jesus (no matter what the threat). Because if we acknowledge Jesus, He will acknowledge us in heaven... But if we deny Him, He will deny us in Heaven.

So, let's never be ashamed of our Lord.

Amen.