

**Title:** Practice What You Preach

**Object:** Children dressed as adults

**Scripture:** **-S-** “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things* and do not do *them*.”

(Matthew 23:2-3)

Have you ever played "Dress Up?" You know, that is when you dress up like your mom and dad and pretend to be a grown-up. We did that when I was a little boy, and when we did, one of my favorite things was when we "played church." One of the children would be the preacher, another would be the song leader, and the others would pretend to play the piano and collect the offering. It was great fun.

I especially liked playing church when it was my turn to be the preacher. Everyone wanted to be the preacher because we thought he was more important than anyone else. When you were the preacher, you could tell everyone else what to do and walk around looking very important.

In our Bible lesson today, Jesus had something to say about "playing church." Oh, He wasn't talking about little children dressing up in their parent's clothes and playing "let's pretend." He was talking about the teachers of the law and the Pharisees in the synagogue where people went to worship. Jesus said that everything that they did was done so that others would see them and think how great they were. They loved to have a special seat of honor in the synagogue and they especially liked it when people called them "Rabbi." That means "Master" or "teacher."

What did Jesus tell us to do about teachers like these? You might think he would say, "Don't listen to them! You don't have to do what they say!" But he didn't. He said, "Obey them and do everything they say. But do not do what they do, because they do not practice what they preach."

"Practice what you preach!" Has anyone ever said that to you? Well, I must admit I have heard it a few times, and even though it hurts when someone says it to you, it is good advice. When it comes to living the Christian life, we need to make sure that we mean what we say and that we aren't just "playing church."

Here is a little poem that it would be good to remember.

You can know a lot of Scripture  
And have the gift to teach,  
But what is more important --  
Is to practice what you preach!

Dear Father, it is important for us to tell others about Jesus and His love for them, but help us to remember that it is even more important for others to see the love of Jesus in us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **We Would See Jesus**

Jesus had entered Jerusalem amid a throng of people and anticipation. He then withdrew to Bethany and now He is back in Jerusalem among the masses of people during the excitement of the Passover week. We are not sure of the exact timing of our study passage in John 12 beginning in verse 20, “*Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; <sup>21</sup> these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’*” We do know that the day after His entry into Jerusalem Jesus cleansed the temple courtyard of the money changers who were always there doing business. This courtyard was known as the “Court of the Gentiles” and was as far as non-Jews could enter into the temple compound. It may have been here that these Greeks saw Jesus. From history it is also known that there were areas outside of Greece that were populated mainly by Greeks, they intermarried with the local population and the Greek way of life was the norm. One such area was Syrophenicia, which is southern Lebanon today. The Mediterranean Sea was on its west and Sea of Galilee was at its eastern border. At the northern end of the Sea of Galilee was the town of Bethsaida, where Philip and Andrew were from. Both Philip and Andrew had Greek names as was common among Jews, especially those living near the Greek areas and we can assume that they both spoke Greek.

The scriptures teach that Jesus came to bring salvation to the Jews first. However, He was in Syrophenicia during His ministry and a Canaanite woman came to Him asking for help for her daughter who was demon possessed. Jesus responded to

her request, saying, **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”** (Matthew 15:24) She persisted and because of her faith Jesus cast the demon out of her daughter. In John chapter four Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well and not only teaches her, but the entire village and many came to believe in Him as the Messiah sent by God. Jesus certainly would have been known to the people in this Greek area of Syrophenicia and would have had a reputation of being a prophet and healer, if not the Messiah. Jesus proclaimed His coming kingdom to Israel first in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. However, the Old Testament also foretold that salvation would go beyond Israel to the Gentiles as God told Abraham, **“Now the LORD said to Abram ... I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you ... you shall be a blessing; ... in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”** (Genesis 12:1-3)

These Greeks express to Philip that they **“wish to see Jesus,”** and this is exactly the same desire for anyone seeking to know the truth about God. Jesus tells all who seek the truth, **“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.”** (Luke 11:9-10) Even though we do not know from the scriptures if these Greeks ever received an audience with Jesus we do know that anyone who truly seeks Jesus will find Him - just as Jesus’ response to Philip and Andrew indicates.

### **The Hour Has Come**

I do not know what reply Philip and Andrew were expecting when they approached Jesus and asked that the Greeks be given an audience. Verse 22 reads, **“Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus.”** However, Jesus’ reply was not what they expected and they were caught by surprise. They might

have expected Jesus to say, “I am am busy, not know” or “I came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and do not have time for the Greeks.” Or even for Jesus to say, “I will see them.” But, Jesus does not say any of these things. Jesus saw the coming of the Greeks as the climax of His mission on earth for He responds, **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”** <sup>(v.23)</sup> The first thing I notice in the this response is that **“the hour has come.”** Up to this time Jesus had been saying the hour had **not** yet come. At the wedding in Cana, Mary makes a request of Jesus, to turn water into wine, which He does fulfill, but first He says to His mother, **“Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.”** <sup>(John 2:4)</sup> Later Jesus’ brothers were encouraging Him to go to Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles so that people could see His power by performing miracles and He responds to their request saying, <sup>6</sup> **“My time is not yet here, but your time is always opportune ...** <sup>8</sup> **Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come.”** After the disciples had left Jesus later came to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles and the Jewish leaders wanted to seize and arrest Him. The Apostle John writes, **“So they (Jewish leaders) were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.”** <sup>(John 7:30)</sup> Sometime after this Jesus was teaching in the treasury area of the temple complex and we read, **“These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.”** <sup>(John 8:20)</sup> Twice when they were going to stone Him, Jesus slips away because it was not His time for suffering. Up to this point Jesus had been saying, “My hour had not come,” but now He says, “My hour is here.” Those who were close enough to hear Jesus say these words may have immediately thought of His triumph entry into Jerusalem and understood Him to mean He was now ready to overthrow the Romans. What Jesus truly meant was that the turning point had arrived, from this

time onward the gospel would go beyond the Jews to the Gentiles or Greeks. It was the beginning of the gospel of salvation going out to the entire world. Let me ask, “How are we doing – you and I?” Has the gospel effectively gone out to our community? Has the gospel gone out to the world? What are you and I doing to be obedient to Jesus’ command, <sup>19</sup>“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20) I know some of our young people are sharing the gospel with the lost and that is good, but what about you, each one of you hearing my voice, what are you doing to share the gospel? As we now understand, it was by Jesus dying and being glorified that people could be saved – you could be saved. Are you telling people about Jesus? About His life, death and resurrection?

### **Death Brings Life**

Jesus goes on to explain to Philip and Andrew and probably others in their group in verse 24, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Jesus is speaking of His death and resurrection. If a grain of wheat is buried it sprouts and bears hundreds of seeds. If Jesus dies He too will then bear much fruit because He will not only die but also be resurrected as proof that He is the Messiah sent from God for the people’s salvation. You too, if you die to yourself and are resurrected in this present life in Jesus you will bear much fruit. If you are not bearing fruit for the kingdom of God – you need to ask why not? By dying Jesus would bring much fruit, millions upon millions of souls to worship God – this is the model the disciples were to follow and it is the model for us to this day.

Following Jesus has **never** saved you or any person. Following is part of salvation; after we are saved we are to follow. This is the example of the disciples, believers and the early church we have in the scriptures. But we are not saved by their examples or even Jesus' example; we are saved by faith believing in Him as God. Jesus' teachings or the truths of scripture do not save us. Jesus did not say He would show people the way. Jesus in fact said, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."** (John 14:6) It is only by believing in Jesus as the Christ, by believing in Him as your Lord and Savior, it is by faith that you are saved and this was made possible by His death and resurrection and the only way to be in relationship with God again. Here is Christ's glory - that He died for our salvation and for this He should be honored. Will you honor Him? What this means is - are you living as He lived? Are you sharing the gospel with the lost as He did? He calls those who claim Him as Lord and Savior to live their lives in obedience to the Word of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit. You no longer belong to yourself. These are principles we learn from scriptures and understand by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Principle - Live for Christ**

We live in a society that values life, as they understand it and billions of dollars are spent in an effort to save people's lives every year. Since Obama Care the amount spent is less and the concern for good medical treatment has diminished, but money is spent on developing and building: life belts, life rafts, lifeboats, life safety lines, life guards, life saving drugs and life insurance, which I used to sell, but it only pays at death. The instruction of Jesus to save lives is strange to the world for He says, <sup>24</sup> **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."** Only when we say, "No"

to ourselves are we able to say, “Yes” to God and then we receive His blessings. The Apostle Paul said to the Galatians, <sup>20</sup> “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. <sup>21</sup> I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.” (Galatians 2:20-21) Paul meant that he had died to self in order that he might live for the glory of Christ. What is your motivation for living? Paul lived for the values taught by the scriptures and Jesus. He certainly did not live for the values of this world. What are your values and how do they compare to those given to us in the Word of God?

### Principle Applied

The difficulty with principles is that they are often abstract and we see them applying to others not us. Jesus knew the nature of fallen and sinful people and this is why as He continued to speak He said, <sup>25</sup> “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. <sup>26</sup> If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” Here we have a translation problem that does not convey the true meaning of what Jesus was saying. Verse 25 contains the word “life” three times – “He who loves his life loses it” and “he who hates his life ... will keep it” and “life eternal.” John used two different words for life; the first two uses are *psychē*, which is referring to the life of the mind, or the inner self we call ego. It is speaking of the human personality that thinks, plans, dreams and schemes. Jesus is saying the independent will of man must die – for a believer of Christ must actively submit their own will to live the will of Christ. The third use of “life” is *zoe*, which when joined with the adjective “eternal” means the divine life. Every



Christian begins their divine life when they accept Jesus as their Savior and are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. This divine life in Christ becomes more apparent as we surrender our lives to Christ and our divine life becomes complete when we enter heaven. When we live and walk in “the way” of Jesus we are surrendering our will and living His. Jesus was speaking of this “way” of discipleship as being the total of a person, the mental, the condition of the heart and their obedience when he said, “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14) Before Paul became a believer in the “Way” of Jesus and he was enemy of the followers of Christ or those of the “Way” and Paul was known as Saul the persecutor of the believers in Christ or those of the “Way,” we read, “Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” (Acts 9:1-2) Saul the persecutor of the people of the “Way” used this term because he understood for these followers of Jesus it meant a complete belief system and lifestyle. In many churches today and for many who call themselves “Christian” they are no longer people of the “Way.” They ignore God’s instructions in the scriptures; they no longer see the need to worship together as God commands. They do not want the messiness that comes with community at times. So they isolate themselves and at best are stunted believers. They ignore the lost and poor around them and their churches become ingrown. They no longer see a need to live by the “outdated” morals and standards of the Bible and they do not understand why they do not know the peace of Jesus. Divorce among those who call themselves Christian is as high a percentage as the unbelieving

world. They have NOT died to their own sinful desires in order that they live for Christ. They have NOT been crucified with Christ and resurrected in Him. As the writer of Hebrews wrote so well as to how believers are to live, “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, **who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**”<sup>(Hebrews 12:1-2)</sup> What joy? The joy of fallen and sinful people returning to God once again to be called His children – they are people of God’s “Way.” This is what Jesus mean when in verse 26 saying, “**If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me.**” Are you willing to do whatever the Lord calls you to do? If Jesus so choses; will you be poor in order to serve the poor? Will you go where He leads you? Are you willing to be despised by family, friends and coworkers for His sake? Are you willing to leave your home and go to a remote corner of the world to preach the gospel of salvation? Jesus wanted His followers to understand to belong to Him means, “**Truly I say to you ( *Jesus means – pointing – you and you and you*), to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.**”<sup>(Matthew 25:20)</sup> Jesus was talking about feeding the hungry, welcoming strangers and the downtrodden, visiting the sick and on and on. Is this the life we are leading – a life of risk, of great adventure, a life of serving others, a life of suffering but also a life of peace, a life based on faith, a life in tune with Christ – is this the life we are leading?

Jesus makes two promises for those who serve Him and believe in Him. Verse 26 reads, “**If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.**” First, Jesus promises

that He will be with anyone who follows Him and second He promises that God the Father Himself would honor all who live servant lives as believers in Jesus. This is true both in the present and the future.

### **Present Truth**

If we follow faithfully and live for Jesus here, we can be absolutely sure that wherever we are, Jesus will be with us. This becomes self-evident in the lives of true believers. It is also true that if we are with Jesus then He is with us – what could be better than this? When I look at my prior life before Christ – I had more money, I had position and authority, my life was good, really good from a world's view. But I was lost and my material wealth did not bring true joy. Now, being with Jesus I have joy – I experience joy even in times of sacrifice and suffering. Jesus is of the greatest value to me and He is worth any cost and yet, any cost I pay to be with Jesus lacks in comparison to the cost He has paid that I might have Him as my Lord and Savior.

### **Future Truth**

Secondly, Christ's promise that we will be with Him may be understood that in eternity when we are with Jesus and if we are with Jesus we are also in the very presence of God. If we here in our present life are with Jesus and are identifying with Him in His suffering and sorrow, serving His people as He did, then we will also be with Him in glory. Paul wrote of this to his spiritual son Timothy saying, **“...For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him...”** (2Timothy 2:11-12)

Jesus tells us that God will honor those who follow Jesus and I believe when Jesus says we are to follow Him it implies completely; mind, body and soul. To follow

Jesus in this life is to follow Him in every way and this means at times - a life of suffering and it is possible even to death for the cause of Christ. But living a life of the "Way" a life submitted to Jesus always involves self-denial. However, Jesus says that suffering will be followed by honor and self-denial by praise. Can you hear God? Close your eyes and listen? As you enter into heaven, hear God's voice saying to the angels and to all the heavenly creatures, including the seraphim – "This is My child who faithfully served My Son and their Lord Jesus. Born a poor sinful child of the world, born in the midst of an ungodly world and people. My Son raised them up out of the mire and they began a life of living like Jesus and faithfully stood by Him. God then says, "Come to Me my child and take your crown and sit by Me. As you lived with Jesus even as the world shamed Him you indeed will now live for eternity in His glory."

God we plead with you this morning that by the power of the Holy Spirit this will be true of each of us, true of our children, true of our grandchildren and true for generations upon generations until you return. Amen.