

“LIVING A DOUBLE LIFE”
Matthew 23:27-28

Frank was a part of the Methodist Church in a little coastal town on the Gulf near the tourist beaches in Cuba called, Boca de Camarioca. On my first visit to the church in Boca, our team helped lay the foundation for the new church building. Frank worked during the day as a cook in a little refreshment stand near the beaches, but he would come and help fix supper for us on a couple of evenings. His wife, Marilyn, was very active in the church, as well as their daughter and grandson. After we left, we heard that Frank and his family had dropped out of the church. Of course we in the States were concerned about him and told Pastor Jose we would be praying for Frank.

Our next visit, we heard more of the story. One night Pastor Jose had a knock on his door, and there was Frank – drunk and apologizing. Frank confessed to Jose that he had not been all that he appeared to be. He was spying on the church for the Communist government. The rest of the family was not involved, but now they knew and were too embarrassed to return to the church. Jose asked what Frank had told the Communists. Frank said, he couldn't tell the Communists anything – the church wasn't doing anything wrong. In fact all he saw was good. He was always treated with love and respect, and he saw how the people loved one another – that's why he felt so bad now. Pastor Jose heard Frank's story and being the compassionate Christian man he is, Jose forgave Frank. But Frank had trouble forgiving himself. If he saw Jose or Idalmis outside, he would walk on the other side of the street. In church Frank had looked like a dedicated Christian. But away from church, Frank lived as an atheistic Communist. It's hard to live a double life pretending to be a Christian, when you are really something else. It takes a lot of energy to keep up that front and live out the lie.

Jesus has always been able to see through the double lives that people lead. In our text in Matthew 23, Jesus unloads on the scribes and Pharisees of that day who lived double lives. “Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees – hypocrites!” On the outside they looked holy and respectable, but on the inside they were prideful, power hungry, greedy and corrupt. Jesus was able to look past their religious mask and see what was really inside.

In Matthew 23:27-28, Jesus says:

²⁷“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. ²⁸In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

In Judaism you were considered unclean if you touched anything that related to a dead body. They would put white-wash on the tombs, just so they would not accidentally touch the grave and they could avoid it. It kind of made the graves look nice and clean on the outside. But everyone knew inside was the foul corruption of dead, rotting bodies. That is what Jesus is comparing to some of the religious people of His day. On the outside, they look holy enough, but on the inside there is wickedness. Jesus was exposing their double lives.

One of the first complaints of many critics of the Church is that churches are full of hypocrites. Actually Jesus made that first accusation. The word, “hypocrite” that Jesus used, is actually a term from Greek drama – where someone would act and play the role of someone else. They would even use a mask that the real person would hide behind.

Is the church full of hypocrites? We have our share, as much as anywhere else does. A hypocrite is someone who says one thing and does something else. We complain about not allowing prayer in the classrooms, but we won’t even pray a prayer of thanks before meals in our own home or have a private devotional time. We complain about not allowing the 10 commandments to be posted in a courtroom, but if someone asked us to quote them, we couldn’t do it. I liked this definition of a Hypocrite: “Someone who complains there is too much sex and violence on his DVD player.” But then I like the church sign that says, “This church is not full of hypocrites...there’s always room for more!”

Steve Green, a Christian recording artist, said, “My tendency is to only let you know enough about me to give you a good impression. I am a recovering hypocrite.” I think if we are living a double life, this is the most dangerous place we could be. Jesus sees through our mask and will expose us for what we really are. But then, that is the point of our recovery. That’s when we admit we are sinners in need of a Savior, that we have been living double lives.

I remember when I was a teenager. I went to church every Sunday with my parents. I knew the creeds and the hymns. I knew the fact that Jesus died on the cross and rose again on the third day – but that really didn’t make any difference in how I lived my life outside of church. On Sunday mornings, I would hold the door open for the little old ladies in the church and they would comment how wonderful I was. “Such a fine, Christian, young man.” But they didn’t know what I had been doing the night before on Saturday night. I was living a double life.

But I kept going to church and eventually I noticed Jesus was watching me. I would try to straighten up, but it wouldn’t last. It finally came to the point something had to give. Living a double life was too exhausting. I wanted Jesus to change me from the inside out. I allowed Him into my life that was a white-washed tomb, to resurrect the dead bones of my life. In my testimony, I used to compare myself to a plastic statue that looked like a Christian on the outside, but inside I was hollow and empty – until I invited Jesus to fill me and live within me. Then I began to live a different kind of double life, which I still tend to live.

What I mean by that is when someone who doesn’t know me, sees me, I’m just an ordinary guy, like anyone else. But if they follow me around and talk to me and get to know me – they will discover my real identity. I am a Christian, through and through; I am a child of the King of the Universe. You might still see evidences of a recovering hypocrite – but for the most part I try to be authentic and honest about who I am in Jesus Christ.

It's like having a secret identity, but underneath it all in Christ, we are super-heroes. The Apostle Paul said we are like clay pots that look ordinary enough on the outside, but on the inside we have an immeasurable treasure – the glory of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 4:7, he said, “we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” When you finally decide to stop living a double life and open up your life to Jesus Christ to transform you and live for Him, you find peace – no more split personality. You no longer have to put on the mask of being a Christian. Jesus will enter your white-washed tomb of a life and resurrect you, and bring you peace. You will no longer be in this civil war with yourself. Quit fighting; end the battle; Let Christ have the victory in your life. No more double life for you.

Otherwise you might end up like Frank. On my last trip to Cuba, we were able to stop at the church in Boca de Camarioca. It was such a joy to see my friends, Pastor Jose and his wife, Idalmis. The church was built with a roof on and they were worshipping inside. I asked about Frank and his family and how they were doing. Jose told me Frank's wife, Marilyn, had returned to the church and his daughter and grandson would attend occasionally. But Frank's shame kept him away, and he was often drunk. I believe he and Marilyn were separated. Living a hypocritical double life can take its toll.

Then Pastor Jose told me about another man in the church, Fredo. Fredo's wife had been active in the church – a very sweet lady, but Fredo didn't want to go to church and be a hypocrite. He worked in the water department with the government. He lived a rough life. The last time our mission team worked on the church (when Chip and Bonnie went with me) we were working into the night to put a cement roof on the church. Fredo stopped by after work and helped us. We got along great. He even came to one of our Bible studies. But we heard about how he drank a lot and had never come to their services so don't expect much.

Pastor Jose said that a few weeks after our team left, something happened to Fredo. One day some of Fredo's friends asked if he would like to go fishing with them to catch some fish for the tourist hotels. Fredo wasn't much of a fisherman, but he thought it might be good to get out and get away from it all. Things were fine for a while, but a bad storm suddenly rolled up and they were in trouble. The waves were huge and they had lost control of their boat. They were about to die. Fredo went to the rear of the boat and started to make his peace with God. He asked for forgiveness for all he had done; he thanked God his family. He asked Jesus to come into his heart, as this storm was about to pull the boat under. Suddenly he heard the Lord say to him, “Fredo, go take the wheel of the boat.” Fredo replied in his mind, “But I don't know how to steer a boat!” But the Lord persisted, and so Fredo went and took the wheel from the experienced sailor who had lost control. Miraculously, they stayed afloat. Fredo slowly steered their way back to shore. At one point Fredo was getting tired and his eyes were starting to close, but the boat hit a wave and he bumped his head on the wheel, as he heard the Lord say, “Wake up and steer!” They made it home safely. And Fredo was a changed man. He went to the church and they celebrated. The last I heard he was incredibly active. Now people might see a rough looking water worker on the streets of Boca. But in reality he is a child of the King, a son of the Living God, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. You

wouldn't know it by looking at him. He's living a different kind of double life – on the surface he looks like a regular guy, but underneath is a committed Christian.

What kind of a double life are you leading? Take off your mask before Jesus and He will let you know.