

Hypocrisy.

Text: Luke 14:1-11

Suggested Hymns:

339, 344, 170, 288, 355

1) What A Detestable Thing Hypocrisy Is

2) How To Get Rid Of Hypocrisy

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 14:1-11, *¹ Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. ² And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" ⁴ But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him, and let him go.*

⁵ Then He answered them, saying, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" ⁶ And they could not answer Him regarding these things.

⁷ So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: ⁸ "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; ⁹ and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.

¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. ¹¹ For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our Gospel contains two parts. In the first part our divine Lord deals with the Sabbath question and shows by word and deed that the old Jewish Sabbath law, stern and strict as it was, prohibiting every kind of manual

labour, nevertheless, was not to be understood so as to prohibit the healing of the sick on that day.

In the second part of our Gospel our divine Lord takes notice of how the guests at the Pharisee's table, where He was eating dinner on the Sabbath day, were choosing the best places. They were contending among themselves about rank and honour. Jesus uses this occasion to reprove them for their conduct and gives them a lesson on humility.

The Sabbath, to which reference is made in the first part of our Gospel, was the seventh day in the week, Saturday. Sabbath means rest, and the commandment given to the Jews was that they should not perform any labour, not even kindle a fire, but keep the Sabbath day holy, and rest.

Two things were commanded in this commandment. The Jews were firstly commanded to keep the Sabbath as a day of rest, and secondly, they were to occupy their minds with holy things, with the Word of God and with prayer.

Now that part of the commandment which deals with the day of rest pertained to the Ceremonial Law and has been abolished through Christ's coming into the world. It pointed to Christ and prefigured His rest in the tomb and the everlasting rest which He was to bring to His people.

When Christ had finished His great redemptive work, the old Jewish Sabbath was no longer commanded. Did not Jesus say, "***The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath***"?¹ Does not Paul tell us in his Epistle to the Colossians, "***So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,*** ¹⁷***which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.***"²

We must not think, however, that the Third Commandment is all Ceremonial Law and has been abolished altogether. What God demands, not of the Jews only, but of all people, is that they should "***not despise preaching and His Word, but gladly hear and learn it.***"

Now that they might have time and opportunity to hear the preaching of the Word of God and to "***bless the Lord in the congregations,***"³ the Christians have chosen a certain day in the week, Sunday, the Lord's day, as the day on which they rest from their labour and meet in the house of God for public worship.

We must well bear in mind, on the one hand, that Sunday has not been fixed by divine command to be the day of rest in the time of the New Testament, but that of their own free choice the apostles and the early Christians have selected this day.

We transgress the Third Commandment if we do not avail ourselves of the opportunity of hearing the Word of God, when it is proclaimed in the house of the Lord, or if we simply do not care for the Word of God and His holy Sacraments.

However, we shall not dwell at length on the Sabbath question. Another subject of great importance is presented in our Gospel, a subject that deals with the church members.

Those who do the most harm to the Church of God are not the unbelievers who are outside of the church, but the hypocrites who are inside of the church.

The Pharisees with whom the Lord deals in our Gospel displayed all the ugliness of hypocrisy. Many a time the Lord Jesus addressed them, saying, “*you hypocrites!*”⁴ and here we have an instance of their hypocrisy, to serve as a warning for us.

With the help of God’s Holy Spirit let consider *Hypocrisy*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. What A Detestable Thing Hypocrisy Is

A hypocrite is a person who pretends to be what he is not. Hypocrisy, accordingly, is the assuming of a false appearance in religion. How detestable to be the one thing outwardly, but the very opposite thing inwardly.

Let us examine what the Pharisees did in our Gospel and we shall see that more plainly.

We read, “¹ *Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely.*” How mean, low, and cowardly! The Lord certainly did not enter the house of this Pharisee uninvited. No; He had been asked to dine with him. In the next verse after our text we are expressly told, “² *Then He also said to him who invited Him.*”

So Jesus had been kindly invited, but not for a good purpose. For they watched Him, both the host and the other invited guests, who were lawyers and Pharisees. They had lured Jesus into their company for the purpose of getting Him to say or do something that was wrong or sinful in their estimation. They showed themselves very courteous and friendly to the Lord Jesus outwardly, but inwardly they were full of hatred against Him. This was their hypocrisy.

Furthermore we read, *“² And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” ⁴ But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him, and let him go.”*

We have good reason to believe that this man who was sick with the dropsy did not drop into the Pharisee’s house on the Sabbath day accidentally, so to say. He may have come there because he was told that Jesus, the divine Helper, who could heal all diseases, would be there, and he availed himself of the opportunity and came with confidence in Jesus.

But all the indications point to a villainous plot on the part of the Pharisees. They had this man come and serve as a trap for Jesus. They knew how kindly disposed the Lord Jesus was to all the afflicted who came to Him for help, and consequently felt assured that He would heal the man.

But their intention was to make an accusation out of that. They wanted to trap Jesus. They showed the greatest regard for the Sabbath and, at the same time, wanted Him to violate the Sabbath law by performing the work of a physician upon the man who was sick with the dropsy.

What base hypocrisy to approach the Lord Jesus with such a pleasant outward demeanour, but secretly to plot against Him and lay snares for Him! How mean and detestable!

We read furthermore, *“⁵ Then He answered them, saying, “Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?” ⁶ And they could not answer Him regarding these things.”*

Here the Lord strikes at the root of their hypocrisy, as it were. In other words, *If you want to be so strict in the observance of the Sabbath, if you want to*

make of the Sabbath a day of absolute rest, why do you not let your ox or your ass perish when it is fallen into a pit on the Sabbath?

Why do you break the rest of that sacred day, and exert yourselves, and work with your hands to free those beasts of burden and save their lives?

In such a case you are not so scrupulous about the Sabbath law, because the loss would affect your pockets; you thereby would be deprived of some of your property. You see nothing wrong in saving the life of an animal on the Sabbath, but to save the life of a man, to heal him from a deadly disease on the day of rest, this you consider a great wrong.

In short, the Lord shows that they are perfect hypocrites who make a great show of religion, but are not honest and sincere about it. They are extremely and severely strict with others concerning the divine Law, but very lenient with themselves, and that shows that their hearts are utterly destitute of love and sympathy.

What a detestable thing to make a show of religion and not to mean it, to be the one thing outwardly but the very opposite inwardly! Even the children of this world despise the religious pretender.

The most detestable thing, however, about hypocrisy is this. The hypocrite, as a rule, is very pious, solemn, and serious outwardly; but inwardly he is filled with pride, conceitedness, contempt of others, and all those vile traits which make up a mean character.

This is shown in the Pharisees of our Gospel. We read, “⁷ *So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them:* ⁸ *“When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; ⁹ and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.*

¹⁰ *But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.”*

Even the shrewdest hypocrite will sometimes betray himself. The Pharisees did so on this occasion. These men usually wore long faces, and walked the

streets in sombre garments, and made long prayers, and surrounded themselves with a halo of piety, that everybody should look up to them in admiration.

And now see how these pious men act at the table, how they dispute among themselves who is to be honoured more and who is to be honoured less! Now they reveal their true character. There is no humility in them. One envies the other. They are filled with pride. All of these mean qualities are so much the more detestable in them because they made such a great outward show of piety.

Beware of hypocrisy! This is the warning implied in our Gospel. You see what a detestable thing it is to be a hypocrite. Examine yourself as to whether there are any marks of hypocrisy in you, such as we see in the Pharisees of our Gospel. And if there is any trace of it, wipe it out and see that you get rid of it.

2. How To Get Rid Of Hypocrisy

Here we must observe, first of all, that all people are hypocrites by nature. Hypocrisy is born in us all. God says both in the Old and in the New Testament, *“All men are liars;”*⁵ and in the prophecies of Isaiah we read, *“But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.”*⁶

Even after a person has been regenerated, after he has been converted from the power of Satan to God, after he has been made a true Christian, that ugly and most detestable of all sins, hypocrisy, will encroach upon him and try to gain ground; and he will have to fight that sin and battle against it all the days of his life.

For woe to him, if ever hypocrisy gets dominion over him, if it is allowed full sway and is not resisted! When that sin has fastened on a person, he is chained with fetters stronger than iron; and experience proves that downright hypocrites are seldom cured.

Their hearts usually become the more hardened, the more they hear the divine Word and the more they assume the outward appearance of the children of God. O how necessary, therefore, for true Christians to be on their guard against hypocrisy and to beat away that ugly, detestable fiend from their hearts and from their homes!

And how is that done? How can a person get rid of hypocrisy? In no other way than by true repentance. He must, first of all, let God open his eyes for him

by the Law. Jesus says at the close of our Gospel, “*11 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled.*”

Inward pride, as we have seen before, is one of the chief marks of hypocrisy. Hypocrites are usually quick in censuring others and finding fault with them, so as to make people believe them to be very religious.

Now a person must learn by the Law of God what an abominable and destructible sin hypocrisy is. He must perceive that all his outward religious works, and even if he is ever so zealous in the performance of religious duties, are not worth anything. They are nothing more than an abomination before the Lord God, as long as his heart is not sincere.

He must know that he will be humbled, yes, that he will be lost and damned forever in spite of his fine outward religious appearance, if the sentiments of his heart do not correspond with his external deeds.

And if he finds that hypocrisy is laying hold upon him, he must quickly come to the Lord God with a contrite and broken heart and say, *O Lord, I have sinned against You, I have not been true to my calling, and I must blame myself; my own sinful heart has led me to do that which I should not have done.*

He must feel truly sorry because he has been acting the hypocrite, and the more sorry, because hypocrisy is not a sin merely against man — though you wrong your neighbour also in deceiving him, but a direct sin against your divine Maker.

And then secondly, he must consider the words of our Saviour, “*he who humbles himself will be exalted.*” Having humbled himself in compliance with the Law, he must look at the Gospel also, which will exalt him.

For all the tears of repentance, all your sorrow, all your good works by which you try to make amends for your transgressions, cannot wipe out or undo the sin of hypocrisy or any other sin.

But there is a Man who was punished for all our sins, for the sin of hypocrisy also; a Man who was charged before the tribunal of God as our Substitute, in our place and stead; and He was sentenced for us and bore for us the punishment which we should have endured on account of our sins.

That Man is the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer. He bled and died on the cross and thereby atoned for all the sins in the world, even for that loathsome, detestable sin, which is called hypocrisy.

For this is what St. John says, *“the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”*⁷

How, then, can a person be made rid of hypocrisy? By faith in the Lord Jesus. He must believe the Gospel, which tells him that all his sins are forgiven through Jesus’ blood and merits.

The Gospel will not only take away from him the guilt of his sins, it will enable him also to walk in newness of life and to successfully battle against hypocrisy and all the sins and temptations with which he is being beset, and finally lead him into the heavenly mansions, where there is no more sin to lead us away from God.

May the Lord save us all from hypocrisy and its terrible doom, and keep us in the true faith unto our end! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 12:8

² Colossians 2:16–17

³ Psalm 26:12

⁴ Matthew 22:18

⁵ Psalm 116:11

⁶ Isaiah 64:6

⁷ 1 John 1:7