



Faithful or Faker?

When I was a little kid growing up in NYC in the 70s, trash and litter were everywhere. It was a problem. And I remember this one commercial that just captivated my attention as a kid...and made me hate littering.

You can watch it [here](#).

On Earth Day, 1971, Keep America Beautiful launched this commercial, which has been voted one of the 50 greatest commercials of all time. It's called *The Crying Indian*.

The ad's star performer was a man called "Iron Eyes Cody." You can find him in Western films with John Wayne and Ronald Reagan, always playing the part of the noble Indian. He was even honored with a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame. Google him and you'll even find pictures of him presenting an Indian headdress to President Jimmy Carter. He was American's Native American Indian.

But something didn't sit right about his story, and some legitimate Native American Indian actors began raising questions about Iron Eyes Cody. A reporter visited his hometown and made a startling discovery: both of Iron Eyes Cody's parents were full-blooded **Italians**. But, to his dying day,

Iron Eyes Cody would never admit that he wasn't a Native American Indian. He would continue to wear his braided wig, headdress and moccasins. He crossed over from the deception of others and into the world of self deception. And that is the pinnacle of hypocrisy.

Hypocrite is the Greek word for "actor." Hypocrisy is appearing to be one thing when in fact you are another. At first hypocrisy is about deceiving others, but when it crosses over into self-deception, that is when it has reached its darkest place.

It was this same sort of self-deceiving hypocrisy that set the religious leaders—the lawyers and enforcers of the religious laws—at odds with Jesus. Hypocrisy kept them from being ready to accept Jesus as the Messiah. And it is hypocrisy that threatens our readiness for his return.

Jesus Condemns the Hypocritical Leaders

It was the Tuesday before Jesus was arrested and crucified. The day had been filled with the religious leaders setting traps for Jesus, trying to manipulate him into saying something that would get him in trouble with either Rome or the people. (Can you imagine what that must have been like? To have super smart experts follow you around all day and try to trip you up?)

As the sun was getting low in the sky, Jesus stood up and gave one last speech. He turned and looked at the religious leaders,

the lawyers, teachers and people who interpreted and enforced the law...he looked them in the eyes and said, "Boo!! I'm unhappy with you because you are **hypocrites!**"

He didn't mean that they were getting together backstage and laughing about how they had tricked everyone into thinking they were really religious. They were hypocrites because they had deceived **themselves** into thinking they were one thing, when they were really another. And their hypocrisy is what was keeping them, and the people of Israel, from recognizing who Jesus was. Their hypocrisy is why they weren't ready to accept him.

Jesus identified three different pieces to their hypocrisy. They had deceived themselves into thinking they were the gatekeepers into God's presence, the upholders of God's ways, and the paragons of God's purity. But they weren't any of those things; they were the opposite.

You can find this conversation in [Matthew 23](#). Jesus pronounces seven woes on them. The first six are in three pairs, and the last one pronounces the final, horrible woeful prediction that they would kill him. I'm going to summarize it here.

1. You think you're bringing people to God, but you're driving people away. You think you're on the inside with God, helping people come to Him. But you're on the outside, keeping people out. When you're through with them, they're not a child of God, but a child of hell!

Well that's pretty strong...why would Jesus say that?

2. You think you're upholding God's laws by creating and keeping all these minute rules about how to give, and make valid oaths with each other (like what it takes for a valid contract today), but all of your rules miss the main points of justice, mercy, love and faithfulness.
3. You think you're pure and holy because you do all these things to appear that way...dressing just so, speaking just so, praying just so, worshiping just so...but the truth is that all you've done is paint a tomb white...you didn't change the fact that you are full of death inside.

Jesus is telling the religious leaders, "You've deceived yourself into thinking that you're with God, when really everything you're doing is against Him, and is hurting Him. You're hypocrites. Your hypocrisy is why you aren't ready to accept me, and it's why you will do what you have always done: you'll kill me, the same way your fathers and grandfathers killed every prophet God the Father ever sent. Now, you'll join them, only this time, you'll be killing the Son of God."

With that, Jesus walked out of the temple courts, and headed out of Jerusalem...the next time he was there, he'd be the prisoner of the religious leaders he'd just condemned.

The Two Questions

Last week I told you how the disciples marveled at the architecture as they left the Temple that evening...the enormity

of it all. It had taken a lifetime to build. They pointed it out to Jesus and he stopped, looked at them and said, "All these stones are going to come crashing down on top of each other and nothing will be left."

To them that would have been an earth-shaking and dangerous thing to talk about openly. So they clammed up and waited until they were alone to ask him what he meant.

Last week I showed you that they asked Jesus two questions. They asked him when the temple would be destroyed, and they asked what would be the sign of his arrival in power and the end of the age. They thought it would all happen at once.

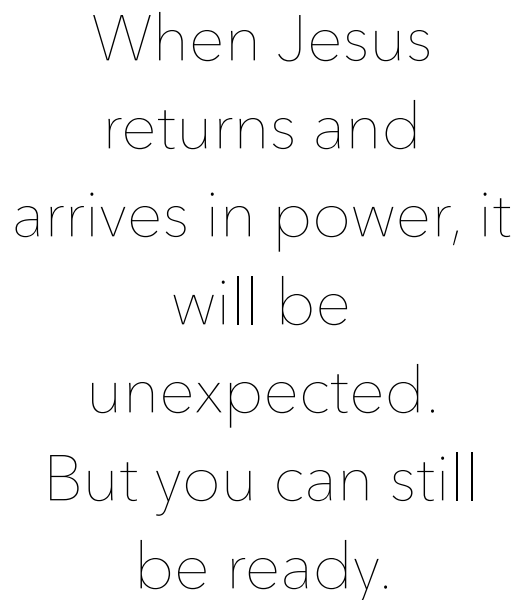
Jesus answered their first question about the temple and assured them it would happen before their generation passed away. But when Jesus answered their second question, about when he would return in power and usher in the end of the age, he told them,

Matthew 24:36

"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

And then he went on to tell three stories all to prove one point: When Jesus returns and arrives in power and ushers in the next step in God's plan of redemption, and the end of the age, it will be **unexpected**. You won't see signs telling you it's coming, helping you get ready. It will be unexpected. So, what are we supposed to do?

I remember my father teaching me to drive in NYC, which is as crazy as Boston. My father's teaching style was exaggeration: "If you're don't know what every car around you is doing at every moment, you're going to get us all killed." I knew what his point was: while you never expect a car to suddenly swerve into your lane, or stop short, or suddenly come flying off an overpass toward you...you can be ready. **When Jesus returns and arrives in power, it will be unexpected. But you can still be ready.**



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So, sitting there on the side of Mt. Olives, looking out over the city of Jerusalem as the sun melted on the horizon, Jesus spent one of his last evenings with the disciples telling them what it means to be ready.

Two Kinds of Stewards

Matthew 24:44-51 (NIV)

44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. 45 “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. 47 Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

48 But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ 49 and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. 50 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. 51 He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This parable is about a test of character. This steward, left in charge, has a choice to make. When the master leaves, the steward can either be wise or he can be wicked. And that choice will prove out whether he is faithful or a faker.

Jesus was inviting them, and is inviting us, to put ourselves in the place of the steward, and ask ourselves the question, “What kind of steward am I? Am I a wise and faithful steward? Or am I a wicked and fake one?”

When a master would go away, he would hand a set of keys to the steward they were entrusting their household to. These were the keys to the storehouses where all the food and materials were kept; everything needed to run the household in the master's absence.

Jesus once told Peter he would give him the keys of kingdom of heaven, and on that day all the jokes about people walking up to St. Peter at the Pearly Gates to try to get into heaven were born. But Jesus probably wasn't talking about the key to the gate into heaven. He didn't say he was giving Peter the *key* to heaven, but the *keys* (plural) to the kingdom of Heaven...the storehouses of heaven.

Jesus told Peter that he would entrust him with the keys to the storehouses of heaven so that Peter, along with the other apostles, could unleash the blessings of the storehouses of heaven in building and caring for the Church. And he told him that whatever he bound or loosed would have been, *already*, bound or loosed in heaven.

In other words, so intimate is the connection for those who are stewards of what God has given them, that we are acting out what God has already decided in heaven. That is the kind of steward God wants. This is the kind of steward who is ready for the master to return.

And what will become of faithful and wise stewards? Jesus pronounces a beatitude over them.

Matthew 24:46

Congratulations to/happy/blessed is the...servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.

Readiness for Jesus' return is about being responsible with what He's given you. This life, right now, this time between today and the day he returns, it is all a temporary commission. You've been entrusted, as a steward, with all these things that God has given you: the job you have, the relationships you have, the money you have, the skills you have, the passions you have, the personality you have, the opportunities you have...you've been entrusted with all of these, and God expects you to use them to build His kingdom, to care for people. If you do, look what will happen...

Matthew 24:47

Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

If you are faithful and wise, what awaits is a permanent place. He takes that steward and rewards him. But the reward isn't: go take a vacation. The reward is more responsibility, and more importantly, a permanent place of trust that would transform his life. And that's why he's so happy, so blessed! What about you? Do you want a vacation? Or do you want a thriving life!?

Readiness for Jesus' return is about being responsible with what He's given you.

Of course, the steward did have another option...as do we.

Matthew 24:48-51

48 But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' 49 and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.

50 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. 51 He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This is the story of a fool. How does he think he will get away with this? A fool doesn't worry about those things. He only knows that, "the master is away, I can do whatever I want." The fool forgets that the present is connected to the future, and the future will one day be the present.

Remember where we are, on the side of the Mount of Olives. Remember what is about to happen. Jesus is about to be arrested and murdered, and rise from the dead and then ascend in glory into heaven to begin to take His throne...and the disciples all sitting there, with the firelight licking their faces, which are twisted as they struggle to understand what Jesus is telling them, they are very soon going to be living out the reality of this parable, when Jesus goes away and they are left behind as stewards of His household, His kingdom. Will they be wise and faithful, or wicked fakers. What will they do with the keys he will leave them?

The wicked servant is only faithful when the master is around. But as soon as the master leaves, he takes the keys to those storehouses, and calls his friends over and throws a party... wasting it all. And do you know who suffers? The rest of the household. All the other people that master left him responsible over. They suffer because he wasn't responsible with what God gave him.

And what is his fate when the master returns unexpected and finds him living this way? Jesus says two powerful and dreadful things: First, he will be cut in two. Second, he will be assigned a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Let's start with the first part of the punishment: why will he be cut in two? There was a moment in Israel's history when King Zedekiah made a covenant with God to free all the Jews who were enslaved in Jerusalem. Now, when they made covenants, they didn't sign them the way we sign contracts. Their way of ratifying a contract was much more involved. They performed a ceremony where they cut one or more animals in half and walked between the pieces, which was their way of saying, "Let this be done to me if I fail to uphold my part of the bargain."

Well, that king and the other leaders of Jerusalem went back on their word and refused to free the slaves, so God said,

Jeremiah 34:18-20

18 Those who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces.

19 The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, 20 I will deliver into the hands of their enemies who want to kill them. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds and the wild animals.

They took a chance that maybe God wasn't serious, and they paid the price. They broke the covenant, and received the punishment: they were cut in two. Those who fail to be faithful and wise are breaking covenant with God, and whoever chooses to do that will be left on their own to face the punishment for breaking the covenant. Once you reject Jesus, there isn't any other way to deal with the punishment for breaking covenant with God. There is no other way into the house! Instead, they will be cast out and put with all the other hypocrites.

Who do you think the disciples thought of when Jesus said the wicked steward would be assigned a place with the "hypocrites"? They would have immediately remembered what Jesus had said only hours earlier, before they left Jerusalem that day...how he had called the religious leaders, lawyers, enforcers of the law, priests, rabbis, all of them, "hypocrites." They were working against God, the Master. And they were in danger of being cast out of the very kingdom they thought they were protecting.

As they left Jerusalem, I'm sure the disciples were glad that they weren't the hypocrite religious leaders. But now Jesus is

warning the disciples, "Don't let this be you! Don't ever become such a hypocrite that you think you're serving me when you're really only serving yourself. My return will be unexpected, and if you're a hypocrite you won't be ready." You'll be caught on the outside, looking in. You'll find yourself outside with everyone else who broke covenant with God and rejected me. And if you make that choice, then my return won't be a blessing to you, but a curse."

Are you ready for Jesus' return? Are you faithfully and wisely using everything He's given you? Are you being responsible with what He's given you? Or are you being foolish and fake?

Jesus' return will be unexpected, but you can be ready. Jesus wants you to know what readiness looks like, and so he told this parable. Readiness is about being a good steward with all He's given you. Use it all in a way that serves Him, because He's given you all you have. And when He returns, you will be ready, and you will be blessed.

"Live as though Jesus is coming back today; plan as though he is not coming back for a hundred years."

Michael Wilkins