

“An Audience of One”
By General Pastor Peter F. Paine
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The idea is that we go through life with an audience of one. Now, when I was packing for my trip, well, when Debbie was packing for my trip, she asked me if I wanted to take my blue suit (it's just come back from the cleaners), and I said, "That'd be fine." She asked if I wanted my blue shirt, and I said, "That'd be fine." She asked if I wanted my red tie with the blue stripe, and I said, "That'd be fine." In other words, if she had asked if I wanted my black suit, my white shirt, and my green tie, I would have said, "That'd be fine." It doesn't really make that much difference to me. Now, if she had said, "Do you want to wear an old sweat-shirt," I would have said, "No, I'm going to church; I have an audience." It would be inappropriate for me to stand before you today in a sweat shirt with holes in it. The point is, "Who is my audience?" I dressed for the occasion, because I'm here with you.

In life, who is our audience? Yes, we should accommodate circumstances and situations, and we should be polite, and we should do all those right things in our interaction with other human beings. In fact, I could do a whole sermon or a whole study on how we should treat each other. That's all good and proper, but, for the purpose of today's message, I would like to bring focus on the point that we really go through life with an audience of one. Do I want to please my wife? sure. Do I want the love and respect of my children? sure. Do I want to interact with you in a way that's pleasing? sure. Do I want you to love and respect me as opposed to the alternative? sure. That all makes sense, doesn't it? I think that's universal, isn't it? If any of us showed up this morning and someone scowled at us and said something mean, or ugly, or hurtful, we would be concerned about that, wouldn't we? It could even ruin our whole day, depending on the nature of the relationship with that person. I texted my wife this morning, "I love you," and she texted back, "I love you." What if she had texted back, "So what?" That would have affected my attitude. I would have called her immediately, and said, "What's happening, honey?" Of course I care about my interactions with people I like; I care about my interactions with strangers. Don't you?

Let's, for a moment, remember there's something bigger at play here, and that's that we have this relationship with God Almighty. We have this relationship with Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior. When you look at the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus speaks to the multitude, He talks about, blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. He talks about people that way, but then we come to Matthew Chapter 23. He speaks in what is going to be, really, His last big public sermon. He speaks to those that are there that day, and He makes reference to the Sanhedrin (the Sanhedrin were 72 men, made up of Sadducees and Pharisees. The Sadducees were born into it, the Pharisees had to 'learn' their way into it. They think differently, they believed differently, they have some different opinions, theologically. They don't generally like each other. As I drove here this morning, I noticed a lot of signs, in both North Chicago and Waukegan: You've got a mayoral race not too far away, and there's some people who don't like each other. I think that's kind of the way it was with the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and that's as much into it as I'm going to go this morning).

Now what I want to do is tell you the words of Jesus:

Matthew 23:1-3 ...whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do...

He said, whatever they tell you to do, do it. Jesus said, these people sit at Moses' seat, they really are telling you all the right things. He told the multitude, whatever the scribes and the Pharisees tell you to do, you should do that, but listen to what He goes on to say, as we explore this idea that we go through life with, really, an audience of one. Does that make sense? And Jesus said (and I'll come back to this in a minute, I just want to make this reference),

Matthew 6:33 Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness...

He was talking about the importance of that priority; the importance of first. I'm talking to you today about the importance of first. I don't want you to miss this point: First really matters. I want to please God, first. Whatever else is true; yes, I want to please others, because it's nice to live peacefully, isn't it? I've been married thirty-seven years; I've tried it both ways. I like peace; I do! I like all that goes with it. The first peace I have to have is with my God. The first peace I have to have is with the Lord. What Jesus said to the multitude, what Jesus said to the disciples, was that, what these people are saying, that's good, but, let's read on:

Matthew 23:3 ...do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

Jesus just said they say one thing and they do another. They say this and do that. Here's what I'm going to challenge you with before I read on; I'm going to step right on your feet, now, not just your toes. Here's the prayer that all of us will go right to that spiritual mirror and we'll ask, and get an honest answer to the question, "How many times in my life; how many times in a week, do I say one thing and do another?" "How many times do I say the right thing because it's the right thing to say, but it's not what my heart is saying?" I understand that there's politics and office politics, and you can't always say to the boss what you're really thinking—and that's a good thing, or I'd be preaching to a whole bunch of unemployed people (do that for long enough and we'd be outside!). We have to be careful that we don't fall into the trap of doing that with the Lord. Let's see what He says about these folks:

Matthew 23:4 ...they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

They make rules that are so hard to keep, and they're not doing them; they're not living them. Oh, they look like it. Let's see what He says:

Matthew 23:5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men...

Jesus knows their hearts. He said, what they're doing, they're not doing it to please God. What they're doing, they're not doing it because of their spiritual relationship. What they're doing, they're doing it to please you!

Matthew 23:5 ... they make broad their phylacteries...

Those are the borders of their garments. It's on their sleeves, and their lapels, and their hats. They make these borders bigger and bigger, and that's so people will know how important they are. It's a symbol; it's like stripes on a military uniform, in a sense, I mean when you see

these borders, you know, right? There's a place in society for all that. Those of you that were in the military, there's a reason why people in the military wear uniforms that distinguish what rank they are. I get all that. He said they do this why?

Matthew 23:5-7 ... to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

Should you give honor to where honor is due (Romans 13:7)? If I came here today, and you didn't show some honor to me, it would be wrong. Depending on the context, it would displease God. You should do that, to a certain extent, but if it ever gets to the place where you show me more honor than you show God, we're in trouble. If it ever gets to the place where you're telling me everything I want to hear, and you're giving me the welcome, but you're not welcoming God, we're in trouble. If I said "Hi," to Jeff and stuck out my hand, and he said, "I don't feel like shaking your hand today," then we'd have to have a church meeting. We're supposed to treat each other certain ways, aren't we? What I'm talking about today is, what's the title of the message? an audience of one. Are you living that way? Are you constantly saying, "God, how do You feel about this? Does this please You?" I'm not saying to stop your interactions with humans being pleasant—keep doing that—but make sure that the first thing you're seeking is your relationship with God, is it pleasing to God?

Matthew 23:6-9 ...call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father...

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't refer to your biological father as father; it's talking about your relationship with your heavenly Father, that you don't put a rabbi or a pastor in place of that relationship. Does that make sense? Saints, we need to live our lives with the understanding that if we don't live a life that is pleasing to God, everything else is hypocrisy. The root word of hypocrisy really means to be an actor. The way that they used to do plays back in this time, when Jesus was speaking, is different than what we're used to seeing now. We're used to modern plays and movies where there's a different actor or every role. The way it was then, there were different masks, and one person would have several masks. So, the actor would come out on stage with a mask, and later would put down that mask and pick up a different mask. Generally these masks were on sticks, and they could hold them in front of their face, and there would be a different mask for each character. So, when you called someone a hypocrite, you're calling them someone who uses a mask to be whatever they want to be, but it's the same person! You can put a different mask in front of your face, but it doesn't change who you are.

What I'm asking today, is, "Is God pleased with your life? Is God pleased with how you're making decisions? Is God pleased with how you treat Him?" Brian, I didn't say that you shouldn't treat your wife good; you'd better. Don't treat your wife better than you treat God, amen? Don't treat your children good and treat God bad. When Jesus said, "Drop your nets and follow Me," you know, there's a whole study on the subject of what it means to *follow* Christ as opposed to just acknowledge who He is. That's the Lord going by. Whose Lord? Whose Lord, huh? Is it your Lord? Is that your Lord going by, or is just someone else's Lord going by? Do you treat Him like Lord? If He's your Lord, do you ask Him, should I do this or do that, or do you tell Him what you're going to do? What did He say about these guys? Let's go on.

Matthew 23:10-13 ... woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!...

When Jesus says, “Woe unto you” that’s as big as it gets. I wonder if there’s any place in your life, I wonder if there’s any place in my life where Jesus is saying, “Woe unto you.” If that’s the case, then I’m in trouble. If that’s the case, then you’re in trouble. But, you know what’s good? if you’re still breathing, then there’s still time to make changes.

Yes, I came here today to give you a hard message. Look for the ‘woes’ in your life. Look for the places where Jesus is saying, “Woe unto you.” You say, “Who are you to come and tell me that?” I’m just preaching, prepare ye the way of the Lord. The day is going to come when we’re all going to be at judgment, and I want all of my ‘woes’ to be out of the way. Any place in my life where Jesus is saying, “Woe unto you...” Are you harboring any hatred? Any lack of forgiveness? Some of you have said, “I forgive you,” but you’re still holding a grudge. Oh, don’t go there preacher! Oh, I did it; yes, I did go there. When we were kids, and mom and dad used to say, “Go tell your brother you forgive him,” and we would say, “I forgive you, because mom said I had to.” Some of us are adults, and we’re doing it like that. Did you forgive in a way that pleases God? What did Jesus say on the cross? Did you ever feel like you had too much to forgive? Hey, I’ve been there. Did you ever feel like you had too much to forgive? Did you ever feel like it’s too big and you deserve a pound of flesh? Think of Jesus on the cross. What did He say? “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” They knew what they were doing in one sense, and they didn’t in another, because they didn’t know who He was. They knew that they were driving nails into His feet and hands, they knew they were spitting on Him, they knew they were jeering at Him, they knew they were casting lots for His clothes, and yet He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Some of you are living with weight of unforgiveness that Jesus wants to help you let go of. It’s not just unforgiveness; what else? Some of you might think that I know what you’re dealing with. If it feels that way, then good, but it’s not me that knows, it’s God. If it feels that way, then good, I’m going to jump right in the middle of that. If you think, “Uh oh, I know what he’s talking about,” deal with it. Not with me, with God.

What did He say about these guys?

Matthew 23:14

... for a pretence make long prayer...

He said, “You are using your religion to look good, but you’re not doing it to please Me. You’ve forgotten that I’m your Lord. You’ve forgotten that your relationship that matters most is with me. When I talk to you about this relationship first thing, let me just talk to you husbands for a minute and well see how far this goes, I might talk to wives and children in a minute, too. Husbands, don’t be so stupid that you tell your wives that you can’t worry about your relationship with her right now, because you’re worrying about your relationship with God. That’ll make a long, cold winter. That’s not how I’m preaching this message. She should be your first *human* relationship. Tell her that when you get your relationship with God right, you’ll be better at being a husband. Some people want to make everyone else feel like they’re out of the picture because they’re working on their relationship with God. If you’re working on your relationship with God, it won’t hurt them, it will help them. If you’re really working on your relationship with God. Andy says, “Sonya, I would take out the garbage, but I’m praying. I’m working on my relationship with God.” Bonehead.

Are we okay with the idea that there are personal ‘woes?’ For some of you, it’s a secret sin, and you hope you’re never caught—I don’t know what it is, but something you hope the church family doesn’t know. We can start with the easy ones: alcohol, tobacco... I’m not

saying you would go to Hell for those, but you would sure hope that our church family doesn't find out about. Pornography. In a crowd this size, judging by the statistics I've read, somebody is struggling with it. It's one of the worst rip-offs in the world. I talk to people all the time that tell me they got snared into it; never thought it would hook them that far. It becomes an addiction. Now, you don't have to go buy it. It's on the internet, and most of us have internet access. Boy, did it get quiet in here. Where's the 'woe unto you' in your life? Am I digging deep enough? Am I prying hard enough? Don't just look at the Scribes and Pharisees and say, "Boy, I'm glad I'm not a scribe; I'm not a Pharisee." Sure you are. You carry this, don't you?

I went to McDonald's this morning and bought a cup of coffee. I had already had coffee. In fact, that McDonald's coffee is in the cup holder of my rental car right now; I think I took one sip. You know why I went there? I went because I wanted to see if somebody would be there that I could invite out to church. I didn't bring them. You say, "Well then, what kind of lousy trip was that to make?" You know what, though? That's what I wanted to do this morning; I wanted to go out and at least be available. Now that I've told you that, I guess I've lost my blessing, because now you say, "Oh, he didn't do something." I didn't tell you that so you'd be impressed with me, I told you that so that you could ask God, "What would you have me to do this morning? What would you have me to go somewhere a little early to...?" You notice I didn't say that God spoke to me and said go—if He had, then I would be able to introduce you someone. I just said that I thought if I went out a little early, and made myself available, then I could be available. Amen? All I got was a lousy cup of coffee. Actually, it's pretty good, McDonald's coffee. What is the 'woe' in your life? What is it that you wouldn't want your church family to know? That's a great place to start, because if you know that, then you know that you have to go to Jesus with it, and say, "I've gotta stop. I don't want to have a secret life." Some of you are wrestling with thing that you can to wrestling with if you'll deal with it right now.

Do you know that you can change the way you feel about something? My wife Debby is the prettiest woman in the world to me. Let's talk factually—and I would say this if Debby were here; she's heard me say this—the reality is, of course there are prettier women, in the world, in terms of what our society calls beautiful. She's in her mid-fifties. She's not the prettiest woman in the whole world to society, but she's the prettiest woman in the world to me. I said that so that I can say this: How's your relationship with Jesus? They get to do this, and they get to do that, and they get to go here, and they get to go there, but, because I'm a Christian, I... Your relationship with Jesus ought to be the most beautiful relationship in your life. Yes, you're going to have to give up something to get it; that's the nature of relationships. Do you still want it the way that you wanted it when you got it, or have you become lukewarm in your relationship with God? That's what happened to the Pharisees and the Sadducees that we're reading about here, right? they got to the point where they were more concerned with how people saw them than how God saw them.

So, this message today is simply titled, an audience of one. That's all I've got for you today; just a simple, simple message. Take that twenty-third chapter, and I encourage you to take some time and read it. Pray, "Lord, where am I guilty of those in the scripture where you said, "Do as they say and not as they do?" Where am I guilty of being like that? If the newest Christian that knows me did everything I did instead of just everything I said, would that be pleasing to You? Am I stepping on your toes hard enough today? Does it make sense what I'm trying to do today? I've slipped lots of times. If you could follow me around with a magic microphone and listen to my thoughts, you'd hear me repenting of all kinds of things: "Oh, God

forgive me for that thought.” “God, forgive me for feeling that way.” “God, forgive me.” “God, help me to have a pure heart.” “God, forgive me for letting my mind go there.” Amen? God can deal with that. God can’t deal with it when you get to the place where your conscience is seared, and you think God doesn’t know what people don’t know. Write that one down: God knows what they don’t. Some of you... These guys here, you know what their problem is? they think they’ve got secrets that God doesn’t know. Maybe this is what I came to tell somebody: You don’t have a secret that God doesn’t know. The secret that you hope nobody else ever finds out about; God already knows it. You say, “You’re being mean to me, Pastor.” No, I’m not. You know why it’s not mean? you’ve still got time to change it. What would be mean is if I came to you today and said, “I love you people, don’t change a thing.” It’s just like your high-school yearbook, “Don’t ever change. You’re awesome! Always stay just like you are.” I had people write that in my high-school yearbook; I’m thinking, “I hope I change.” “Don’t ever change!” I didn’t come here today to tell you, “Don’t ever change!” I came here to tell you to search out those things in your life where Jesus is saying, “woe unto you.” And I didn’t tell you that I don’t have any areas like that in my life; I told you that I do. That’s why Apostle Paul said, “When I would do good, evil is always present...” (Romans 7:21) It’s not a battle that you fight once and it’s over.

Let’s recap and see if we can make some sense out of what the preacher said today. I came to say today that God is an audience of one. That doesn’t mean that you don’t want to have good relationships with everyone else. Of course you do! But the audience that you really want to have the best relationship with is Jesus. That’s what matters more than anything else. If you have great relationship with every person on earth, but Jesus is saying about you, “don’t be like this person because they say one thing and do another...” “Pastor, you’re being mean today.” I want to get back on that a couple more times today; I’m being hard on you today because that’s what Jesus is trying to help us get. This isn’t a game; we’re not just supposed to come to church and look good and smell good. By the way, y’all are some pretty good-looking folks, and you smell pretty good, and I’m glad of that. I don’t want you coming in here looking bad and stinking. But some of you look good and smell good on the outside, but you’re stinking to God! I have a feeling that I have to get just a little more plain for somebody. You say, “I don’t stink to God.” Good. Keep it that way. If you’re saying, “Well, I’ve got this one area of my life that’s sure smelly,” change it. Change it by saying, “Lord, help me.” Maybe you can do it alone, just you and the Lord, and maybe you need help.

I’m not quite there yet—somebody needs just a little more prying, so stick with me. I had a person come to me (general ministry, no names, no locations), and said, “I’ve fought this battle for a long time; it’s alcohol. I’ve prayed; I’ve come to the altar for prayer... I’ve asked, but it’s still there.” I said, “What do you think you need?” He said “I think I need a support group.” He and I did some research and found a Bible-based support group for people struggling with alcohol. More recently, he told me that’s the longest string of sober days he’s had in his adult life. He said, “I’m thankful that I got the help I needed.” I’m telling this to you today, because some of you believe that if you go outside your church family for help, that somehow you’ve violated the grace of God. What I’m saying is, if you’re struggling with something, get help and get it dealt with. I have a brother-in-law who is a counselor for people with a gambling addiction. That’s one I don’t understand; I’ve never had a problem with that. I’m not mocking it, I’m not belittling it, I’m just saying I don’t get it. Some people have lost everything they own because they have a gambling addiction. He’s a counselor for that. Now, if somebody came to me with a gambling addiction, I might share with them a few Scriptures, but I might suggest to

them to find somebody who understands that dynamic. Now, did I say, “Don’t go to Christ for your answer?” Get that thought out of your head quick. Jesus is the answer. But I had to go a little deeper on that one point to help somebody who’s struggling with something and they haven’t got the victory yet to understand that it’s okay to ask for help if you need help, but don’t live any longer with the ‘woe unto you.’ Am I getting through to somebody today? Am I helping somebody today say, “You know what? it’s time for me to honor my most important relationship and that’s with Jesus.”

The title of the message today is, “An Audience of One.” So you’ve got an audience of One; make sure its pleasing. If you’ve gone astray, read Luke 15. Remember that when you come home, He’ll receive you.

Luke 15:11-32 ... Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me...

I had somebody criticize me not too long ago. They said to me, “It seems to me all you do is preach about love, love, love.” He said he had a bone to pick with me, so I waited to hear what it was he disagreed with; I didn’t get it. He said, “God isn’t all love.” I said, “Let me see your Bible; I want to see if there’s a page missing here.” He said, “What about judgment?” I said, “Yeah, what about judgment? Either you’re pleasing to God come judgment Day or you’re not. What’s wrong with that? That’s not a lack of love.” He said, “You’ve got to preach a little more hellfire and brimstone.” How am I doing today, church? Judgment’s coming, and if you don’t get the ‘woe unto you’s out of your life, it’ll be a sad day. I didn’t come to condemn you. If that’s the way it sounded, let me apologize, if it sounded that way. What I’m trying to say is, if there’s anything that isn’t pleasing in your relationship with God, change it while you can. If you need help outside this body, get with your spiritual leader and get some counsel and prayer and make the changes. Stop living like secrets are kept from God. You don’t have a secret kept from God. You just don’t. He knows what you hope nobody else finds out. Today I came to tell you if there’s something that offends in your life, take a step in the direction to change it. That’s what I came to say today. I just said, take a step in the direction to change it.