

Sunday, October 31, 2021 am

Teachings of Jesus (61)

Woe to You Hypocrites

Matthew 23

Today, we continue our study of the teachings of Jesus. We have now come to the final week that we culminated in His crucifixion, the sacrifice for our death. There are 89 chapters in the 4 gospels. Of these, 25 are devoted to His final week, from His triumphal entry on Sunday to His crucifixion on Friday (59 leading up to that week & 5 for His resurrection). There is much teaching in these chapters. The next few lessons will notice just a few of His messages during this week (I have 5 more lessons scheduled for this theme – TT). We begin today with His condemnation of the hypocrisy of the religious leaders.

I. Background

- a. As noted, Jesus has finally entered Jerusalem. The people are ready to make Him king.
- b. The council and others have plotted to get rid of Jesus – John 11:47-53, after the raising of Lazarus where they determined it was needed for him to die for the sake of the nation. Of note, Mark 14:1-2 notes that as they plotted to put Him to death, they wanted to wait until after the Passover feast.
- c. His time has now arrived – After entering Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1ff records His triumphal entry), several events unfold over the next few days. These include the cleansing of the temple a second time (Matthew 21:12-17), several parables about their rejection (21:28-22:14), and several attempts to entrap and discredit Him in His words to turn the people against Him (21:23-27, 22:14-46). Everything they tried backfired.
- d. This leads to our text for this lesson. In this text we have the strongest and most direct condemnation of the religious leaders anywhere in scripture. This chapter is believed to be “the straw that broke the camel’s back.” In this lesson we will notice a few of the things Jesus said (time will not permit an examination of the entire message).

II. The Hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes

- a. Vs. 1-3 – First, it must be noted. Jesus recognized their authority. The “seat of Moses” could be reference to a prominent seat in some synagogues where the leader of the synagogue would speak from the word of God (LOM). He gave instructions that what they say (that was from the Law) the people were to do it.
 - i. Note: The character of a presenter does not matter if what he says is the truth. Truth is truth, regardless of who is speaking. BUT that does not diminish the importance of proper character of leaders as they speak, teach, act and enforce the law. So much is emphasized about the character of leaders in scripture, and this text bears that out.
- b. The word hypocrite.
 - i. The word is a transliteration of the Greek work (ὑποκριτής, hypokritēs). It was a word associated with acting. An actor is one who pretends to be someone he is not. Hence the word describes one who acts differently that what he professes to believe. It is a strong word that should be used with caution because of its indictment.
 - ii. It is found 7 times in this chapter, and that both preceding and succeeding examples of their hypocrisy.
 - iii. Jesus in this chapter identifies them scribes and Pharisees. Scribes were interpreters of the Law (similar to a lawyer today), but they would also be involved in copying and studying the Law of Moses. Most of them were Pharisees. We know that Jesus also dealt with the Sadducees, the priestly class (and more progressive). As we know, they too would have been involved in the hypocrisy Jesus exposed.

- c. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes
- i. Vs. 3-4 – Double standards. They gave commands to others – often the truth of the Law of Moses – but they did not “practice what they preached”. They even placed HEAVY burdens on others, but would not even try and do what they commanded (e.g. not even lift a finger).
 - ii. Vs. 5-12 – Prideful – there was an arrogance and self-righteous demeanor among them.
 1. ***They did what they did to be seen by men*** – and at times they actually drew attention to themselves.
 2. They expected places of prominence and recognition for their scholarship.
 - a. Typically, when one acts this way, there is an air of superiority there.
 - b. Jesus elaborates on our proper attitude. This is WHY we should not be seeking titles. Consider the very titles mentioned here – Rabbi, Father or Teacher. This passage is one reasons WHY we do not attach titles before our names (Pastor, Reverend, Bishop, Father, etc.). While sometimes, one may DESCRIBE himself by an appropriate term, let it NOT be a self-seeking title.
 - iii. Vs. 13 – Self-imposed rules and laws.
 1. First usage of ***hypocrite***. This is also the first of 7 (or 8 depending on translation) ***woes***. A word that is described as the opposite of a blessing. Jesus is calling condemnation upon them for their bad behavior.
 2. ***They shut up the kingdom*** - They create laws that go beyond God’s boundaries, binding where He has not bound and loosing where He has not loosed. This is seen in condemnation of Jesus and His disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath and failing to wash their hands (ceremonially) before eating (Matthew 12:1-2 15:1-2)
 - iv. Vs. 14 – Greed and self-serving decisions.
 1. NOTE: This verse is not found in earlier mss, however it is found in the parallel passages (Mark 12:40, Luke 20:46-47). So Jesus clearly taught this.
 2. ***They devoured widows houses*** – they were greedy and uncaring of the needy. They could have exploited widows and others in times of distress.
 3. This demonstrates their self-serving nature. Sometimes leaders use their influence to selfishly obtain from others, often times to the detriment of those they are taking from. Think of tv preachers who ask you to send them money with lofty promises.
 - v. Vs. 14 – Self-promoting worship. ***With pretense they made long prayers***. There is nothing wrong with a long OR a short prayer. It is a matter of the heart. Matthew 6:7 Jesus addressed this as He instructed us how to pray – NOT like the heathen do, who think they will be heard for their many words. Paul also dealt with similar attitudes with the Corinthians as they boasted about their “gifts of the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12-14).
 - vi. Vs. 15 – Self-proselytizing, Self-promoting religion.
 1. ***They travel land and sin to win one more proselyte*** – because they are not trying to win anyone to God, but to their way of thinking. IF you don’t think like them, you HAVE TO be wrong! They seek to “convert” you to their doctrines.
 2. This is descriptive of many false teachers who will exploit anyone that will gullibly listen to them (e.g. the ignorant, the lazy, the emotional, the young, etc.). And the church is not exempt of such – “brethren” who in some dispute try to win others to their side, OR to woo them to their doctrinal interpretation.
 - vii. Vs. 16-22 – Deceptive oaths and wording – Jesus gives several examples.
 1. Woe #4 (or 3). FIRST, He calls them blind guides. They were in positions of leadership, and they were leading people down a destructive and ungodly path. In this case, it involved honesty.

2. Two examples are given
 - a. Swearing by the temple, but not the gold of the temple
 - b. Swearing by the altar, but not the gift on the altar
3. Jesus calls them “fools and blind” in this. They were ABSOLUTELY being deceitful in making this distinction (similar to a child “crossing his fingers” behind his back, as if to say that he really did not mean it).
 - a. Jesus notes that both the temple and altar are from God, just like the gift presented to them.
 - b. He adds in vs. 22, whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by God Himself.
 - c. Consider that in all of these, GOD ESTABLISHED THEM.
4. Of course, the point is, be honest ALWAYS and in everything you say. Double speak will destroy your credibility AND that of the church very quickly. We are better than that! Remember Jesus in Matthew 5:33-37 where Jesus spoke about taking oaths and concluded, “Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’, and your ‘no’ be ‘no’” - PERIOD! Anything more than these is from the devil.

Sunday, November 5, 2021 am

Teachings of Jesus (61)
Woe to You Hypocrites (2)
Matthew 23:23-36

Last week we began an examination of Jesus in what was likely His final public teaching. And it a transition in our study of the teachings of Jesus – addressing some of His teachings on the final week. It was some of His strongest teaching and exposing of religious leaders. This teaching came in the midst of the week that would result in the crucifixion of Jesus. It came after cleansing the temple, confounding attempts to entrap Jesus in His words, and various parables that the corrupt leaders knew were directed at them. Matthew 23 is likely, “the straw that broke the camel’s back”. But it was done because it was time according to God’s plan (Galatians 4:4).

With this backdrop, last week we noted that the word hypocrite originally described an actor, which is a good description of a hypocrite – a pretender. We then began noting various descriptions of their hypocritical behavior included: 1) Double standards; 2) Pride – loving recognition and thinking they were superior; 3) Self-imposed rules and laws – they shut up the kingdom to others; 4) Greed and self-serving decisions – as they devoured widow’s houses; 5) Self-promoting worship – for a pretense, they made long prayers; 6) Self-proselytizing religion; 7) Deceptive oaths and wording – they believed it was acceptable to lie to some. That brings us to verse 23 where we will continue our study.

III. The Hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes

a. Vs. 23-24 – Overbearing legalism –

- i. ***They pay tithes of spices, but have neglected the weightier matters of the law.***
- ii. The Jews had set many religious rules intended to ensure that they did not cross lines in the Law of Moses. So when a principle was presented, they would think of scenarios and legislate those scenarios.
- iii. Their problem was NOT with taking measures to ensure they kept the law, or even staying away from “the line” – BUT they would move the “line” often far to the right (more conservative) and then BIND their new line. They went overboard and became overbearing in their rules, which was addressed earlier.
- iv. Furthermore, they failed to consider the spirit (actual intent) of the law OR to show compassion for others in their enforcement (giving benefit of the doubt, acknowledging the possibility of being in error, etc.). This was a HUGE deal.
- v. Understand, Jesus did NOT condemn the exactness of keeping these laws. But Jesus did note that they had neglected the “weightier matters of the law” – justice, mercy and faith.
 1. ***Justice*** – indicates fairness and consistency. It is praising what is right and condemning what is wrong. The emphasis is on consistency without prejudice. One of the problems with these corrupt leaders was their inconsistency – they would show favoritism toward their own and bend the rules in their favor. This is unjust. Society very quickly sees through a lack of true justice.
 2. ***Mercy*** – this is compassion and kindness. This has to do with showing pity and tenderness in dealing with others, especially those struggling or disadvantaged. Again, we have already seen the corrupt leaders devoured widows houses and burdened the people with heavy loads.
 3. ***Faith*** – or in this case, faithfulness – this is about trusting God to the point of obeying Him. WHY do we submit to His will? It is because of our faith. When our faith is as it ought to be, we will faithfully serve Him in everything – not just outward acts, but with a loyal heart. BTW, you CANNOT have faith without

obedience – James 2:14-22.

Again, these rulers failed to show due faithfulness to God in the way they administered His law.

- vi. NOTE that He then said, *“These you ought to have done WITHOUT leaving the others undone.”*
 1. Did Jesus believe the little things were important? Consider: Matthew 5:19, Whoever breaks one of the LEAST of these commandments...; Luke 16:10, He who is faithful in what is LEAST is faithful also in much.... The answer is absolutely!
 2. BUT, getting all the small details right without properly considering the intent or without proper motives is like mere noise to God (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 and love).
 3. WHEN our heart is right, the small things will come naturally.
 4. Consider Micah 6:6-8, With what shall we come before the LORD?... *He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God? This describes our text.*
- vii. He then described their behavior as *“blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.”*
 1. Both gnats and camels were unclean. And it is said that some Jews would drink their wine through a cloth, or strain it first to make sure they did not drink an unclean insect.
 2. Here Jesus with irony exposes their failures and inconsistencies – they would go that far in drinking, but then they would turn around egregiously violate the most fundamental of commands.
 3. Again consider the greatest commandment – Matthew 22:37-39 – ALL the law hinged on these. Much of what they did was without love.
- viii. NOTE: This verse is open to great abuse in both directions.
 1. Many are guilty of the very thing Jesus describes here – binding where God has not bound. They establish standards of morality, worship practices, doctrinal teaching and general living that are far more restrictive than what the text actually teaches. Then they use the expression, *“these you ought to have done...”* as justification for their standard. WHEN someone asks, *“Where is the authority for what you are doing?”*, realize that it is a legitimate question. How do we answer that?
 2. On the other hand, many today use this verse to challenge those who ask for *“book, chapter and verse”* and try to be as exact as possible (without the previous mentioned excess). Often times they will use derogatory descriptions (legalists, Pharisees, etc.) to villainize. Far too many today believe that as long as we are sincere and keep the principle of the law (of course they define what the principles are) then God will overlook the little details (e.g. how the work of the church is done, how we worship, etc.).
 3. As we make determinations as to how to serve God, we need to strive to be as exact as possible, BUT we must NEVER forget the underpinnings of those laws (e.g. loving God and your neighbors, intent of qualities, etc.), which in some instances may leave room for some judgment and even liberties.
 4. Note: For those sincerely striving to be right with God, determining where to draw the line is not always an easy thing to do. We want to be cautious and flee from temptations realizing that Satan loves the fence straddler, but we must temper that with the foundational values of scripture (justice, mercy, faith, love, integrity, sincerity, etc.) AND respect for others who are also trying to do the right thing but may not see things exactly as we do. This will NOT ignore errors, even the *“small stuff”*

- b. Vs. 25-28 – False appearances –
 - i. Two more **woes** are pronounced as Jesus describes their hypocrisy.
 - ii. **They cleaned the exterior of the cup and were like the outsides of tombs externally** – appearances that they were pious and godly.
 - iii. **But inside, they were full of extortion, self-indulgence, and uncleanness** (dead men’s bones).
 - iv. This is the definitive description of hypocrisy – outwardly, they were acting and pretending to be the most upright of Jews. People would look at them, admire them (for the most part) and desire to be like them (e.g. as righteous as they are). BUT, inside they were the opposite of the appearance they were portraying. They were doing ungodly things, had ungodly attitudes and thoughts. IOW, they were putting on a show!
 - v. God is NOT impressed with such behavior. If He emphasizes anything, it is consistency that emanates from the heart. And God knows your heart – Psalm 44:21, Acts 15:8
- c. Self-condemning witnesses (29-36) – in these verses, Jesus summarizes their condemnation by noting how their hypocrisy will be known and exposed. He notes:
 - i. **They built the tombs of the prophets and righteous and adorn them** - showing honor
 - ii. **They declared that they would not have killed those righteous prophets** – in that they thought themselves better than their ancestors
 - iii. **Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves** – Jesus notes that they will fill up the measure of their father’s guilt by killing and persecuting God’s teachers and people in various ways and bring upon themselves the coming destruction which cried out from the blood of ALL the prophets from Abel to Zechariah (the order here is based upon the Hebrew Bible with Abel in the first book and Zechariah in the last – 2 Chronicles 24:20-21)

IV. Lessons

- a. Comparing the beatitudes with the woes of Jesus in Matthew 23.
 - i. As noted previously, there is contrast between the Beatitudes, the first recorded public sermon of Jesus in Matthew, and the condemnation of our text, the final recorded public sermon of Jesus in Matthew. Consider: Blessed are:
 1. The poor in Spirit (Matthew 5:3) – The Pharisees were prideful
 2. Those who mourn (5:4) – they loved places of honor
 3. The meek (5:5) – they bound heavy burdens on the people – anything but gentle and mild.
 4. Hunger and thirst after righteousness (5:6) – they devoured widow’s houses
 5. Merciful (5:7) – neglected weightier matters - mercy
 6. Pure in Heart (5:8) – The Pharisees called hypocrites, outward appearances, inside full of extortion and indulgence
 7. Peacemakers (5:9) – They would declare war on God’s people (vs. 34)
 8. Persecuted (5:10-12) – They would persecute God’s prophets and righteous
 9. Other observations:
 - a. (5:3) “Theirs is the kingdom” – “You shut up the kingdom” (23:13)
 - b. (5:9) “Called sons of God” – “a son of hell” (23:15)
 - c. (5:8) “They shall see God” – “blind...blind...blind” (23:16-24 – 4x)
 - d. (5:5) “They shall inherit the earth” – “on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth...” (23:35)
 10. NOTE: We should not press this too far, but it is an interesting observation, and the texts CLEARLY are contrasts with one another.
- b. Are we hypocritical in our conduct?
 - i. We can learn much about the character of hypocrisy by examining this text. We see qualities the tend toward hypocrisy OR are outright hypocritical.

- ii. God has no place for hypocrisy. He demands integrity and truth from each of us.
 - iii. As we read texts like these it is a good time for a spiritual inventory of our lives – 2 Corinthians 13:5
- c. Concerning leaders –
- i. God has no place for hypocrites in the church anywhere. But this is doubly true of those in positions of leadership – James 3:1.
 - ii. As Jesus presented this most scathing of messages, it was directed primarily at the leaders who had failed both in their personal lives and in properly directing the people toward God. No wonder they were to be held accountable.
 - iii. Biblical leaders rise to their positions FIRST by example, and then ability – 1 Peter 5:2-3, 1 Timothy 4:12-16, 3:1-13, etc. It is in our unhypocritical examples that we gain respect over those we have been entrusted with leadership.

This occasion essentially brings to an end the public teaching of Jesus. He still had plenty to say, especially to His disciples, but we find here conclusion. Of interest as we bring this lesson to its conclusion is to contrast the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 at the beginning of His preaching and teaching as recorded by Matthew, and the woes pronounced upon the leaders here at the end.

Because of the teachings of Jesus on this occasion, they were not going to wait any longer so they sought opportunity to take Him (they would succeed because of Judas Iscariot).

Is your heart and soul consistent with your outer conduct?