

## Matthew 23:25-39 – “Hypocrisy Confronted part 2”

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Jesus is addressing the fraudulent and fake showing of the scribes and Pharisees. These are two groups within the religious leaders of the day. Sadly they're the ones that have been opposing Jesus and doing their best to prevent others from coming to Jesus. So Jesus reserves now His strongest indictment against them in the form of 8 woes.

### Summary Statement:

Jesus continues His pronouncement of 'woes' on the hypocritical religious leaders all the while maintaining a grief of heart for their fake showing, their feigned support, and their failing submission.

### 1. Grief Over their Fake Showing – 23:25-28

**23:25-26 - “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup> Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.”**

This 6<sup>th</sup> 'woe' addresses the need these religious leaders had with appearing clean and holy on the outside. They weren't concerned with being pure inwardly. They didn't want an *inward transformation*; they were more interested in an *outward demonstration*. An outward demonstration of righteousness, but it was nothing more than self-righteousness; a show of spirituality and religion. They want to look pure on the outside, yet on the inside they were completely rotten.

- They were being driven by greed (**extortion**) and unrighteousness (**self-indulgence**).

Could you imagine if I had you over for dinner and all I was concerned with was making sure my dishes and cups only appeared to be clean on the outside? I pour you a drink of water and it's like black with some things swimming around in it. You'd be like, 'Umm, could I have a different cup?' And I respond with, 'What's a matter? The outside of that cup is perfectly clean!' You're not concerned with how many times I've washed the outside of it if the inside is not equally clean.

- And yet, we try to play this game with God so many times where we try and make things appear clean on the outside, yet He sees right through to the swirling yuk that's going on inside.

- When we take care of what's going on inside, it will certainly reflect on the outside.

**23:27-28 - “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. <sup>28</sup> Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”**

This 7<sup>th</sup> ‘woe’ is linked with the previous one. It was all about the externals for these religious leaders. Jesus plays off of a common practice around Jerusalem.

- As pilgrims came to Jerusalem for the Passover, the crowds coming into the city would potentially be in the millions. There wasn't enough room within Jerusalem for everyone. So they would sometimes sleep out in the countryside around the city.
- Now according to the law of Moses, a person coming into contact with a dead person, or the bone of a man, or a grave, would be unclean for 7 days (Numbers 19:16). This would mean that a person travelling a distance to come and observe the feast of Passover would miss out on going to the Temple and offering their sacrifice. It would be a wasted trip.
- So to be sure this didn't happen, they would go through the tombs in the countryside and paint them white so they stood out. This way nobody would accidentally defile themselves.

Jesus uses this as a perfect picture of the scribes and Pharisees. They made sure they stood out in a clean, undefiled way. But it was only a mask for what lay below the surface – rot and death.

- They didn't seem to care that they were complete frauds, as long as they could fool people into thinking they were righteous.
- Sometimes our desire to appear a certain way before people can lead us to being dishonest and hypocritical. We may crave so much to be accepted or liked that we can end up walking in falsehoods and overlooking it because we reason that the ends justify the means.

We'll look at a comparison between these 8 Woes and the Beatitudes momentarily, but remember how the entire crux of the Sermon on the Mount was that it was all about the heart. God isn't looking for outward reformation but inward transformation.

- And in the same way, we can get so caught up on our reputation and how we want to be seen by others. Whereas God is concerned with our character. Our reputation is how we are seen by others. Our character is how we are seen before God. Take care of character, and reputation will follow.
- Sadly the Pharisees were living more for reputation than character.
- **Psalm 51:6**, *"Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom."*

The sad thing with this is that people thought these religious leaders would provide some sort of sanctification or purity by being around them, but it only brought greater defilement.

## 2. Grief Over their Feigned Support – 23:29-36

**23:29-33** - ***"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,<sup>30</sup> and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'**"<sup>31</sup> **"Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets."<sup>32</sup> Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt.<sup>33</sup> Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?***

This 8<sup>th</sup> and final 'woe' depicts how these religious leaders esteemed the prophets that had gone before them. They built and decorated great tombs in their honor, however they did this to say that they would have never treated the prophets in the way their fathers did. They acted as though they were so much more superior than them and yet it's the height of hypocrisy as these leaders had already been plotting the murder of Jesus – the ultimate messenger of God.

- **John 11:53**, *"Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death."*

In saying, ***fill up, then, the measure of your father's guilt***, Jesus is basically saying (as the NLT translates it) *"Go ahead and finish what your ancestors started."*

- These present leaders are acting exactly like their fathers who killed the prophets who spoke God's word to the nation. In fact, they're all part of the same family, with the devil as their father. They are a ***brood of vipers!***

In verse 34 Jesus now moves from speaking about their past to dealing with their future. And He lays out for these religious leaders that they are going to continue this trend of taking out the messengers of God...

**23:34-36 - *Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city,<sup>35</sup> that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.<sup>36</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.***

Jesus will send out His disciples and many will be persecuted and killed at the hands of these religious leaders. These guys were a part of the opposition of God, right from A-Z. Abel was the first martyr in the Bible (Genesis 4) who was killed by his brother Cain. Cain didn't like that his offering wasn't accepted before God, he did things on his terms, much like these religious leaders. He took out his anger on his brother Abel and he became the first martyr. Zechariah was the last martyr who was killed. He spoke out about the apostasy of Judah's leaders. They didn't like it and stoned him in the court of the house of the Lord (2 Chronicles 24:20-21).

- Now there's some confusion over which Zechariah is being spoken of here. The Zechariah in 2 Chronicles is the son of Jehoiada, not the son of Berechiah. The Zechariah which wrote the book after his name is the son of Berechiah (Zechariah 1:1). But it doesn't seem like this is the one that fits the description given. It's possible that Jehoiada was actually Zechariah's grandfather and his father was Berechiah. What we do know is that the description of his death fits what happened to the Zechariah of 2 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew Bible making it fit well with the idea that Jesus is communicating: from beginning to end you have slain the prophets.

These religious leaders will be guilty of all the righteous blood shed because they will be responsible for killing those that God sent in His name, and ultimately for killing THE righteous One, Jesus Christ.

- **Acts 7:51–52**, *“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.<sup>52</sup> Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold*

*the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,"*

Because of their actions Jesus lets them know that judgment is going to come upon them and it will happen in their generation. It indeed happened when the Romans came in 70A.D. and destroyed their city and temple. Many Jews were killed or sent out of their land.

And sadly this is not the way it needed to be. Jesus came to address the heart of the problem, which was a problem of the heart. That's what the Sermon on the Mount was all about. He wasn't showing a way into the kingdom through religion, he was showing the kingdom way, and it was about the heart.

- **Matthew 5:20**, *"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."*
- You weren't going to get in by being outwardly righteous like the scribes and Pharisees, you needed to be inwardly righteous, and that only came through Jesus Christ. We needed a heart transplant.

And so as Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes, these proper attitudes we were to be, we see now in Jesus' last public address how these scribes and Pharisees have not only missed it, they've moved further away from the heart of God.

Comparison of the Beatitudes and the 8 Woes:

**Matthew 5:3**, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

**Matthew 23:13**, *"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men..."*

- Entering the Kingdom vs. Shutting up the kingdom

**Matthew 5:4**, *"Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted."*

**Matthew 23:14**, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses..."*

- Mourners comforted vs. Mourners devoured

**Matthew 5:5**, *"Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth."*

**Matthew 23:15**, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."*

- Meek inherit the earth vs. Proud send souls to hell

**Matthew 5:6**, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled."*

**Matthew 23:16–18**, *"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.'<sup>17</sup> Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?<sup>18</sup> And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.'"*

- Hungering for holiness vs. Greedy for gain

**Matthew 5:7**, *"Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy."*

**Matthew 23:23–24**, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."*

- Obtaining mercy vs. Rejecting mercy

**Matthew 5:8**, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God."*

**Matthew 23:25–28**, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.<sup>26</sup> Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.<sup>27</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.<sup>28</sup> Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."*

- Pure in heart vs. Defiled in heart

**Matthew 5:9**, *"Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God."*

**Matthew 23:29–33**, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,<sup>30</sup> and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'<sup>31</sup> "Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.<sup>32</sup> Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt.<sup>33</sup> Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"*

- Peacemakers vs. Persecutors

Now when we read through these woes, it's very easy for us to sit back and think, *'What's a matter with these guys?? How could they have gotten so far off target? How could they have become so self-righteous and hypocritical like this?* And before we launch into the judgment and condemnation of such hypocrisy and wickedness, we must ask ourselves, has there been any of us in these pronouncements of woes?

- We're as guilty as these leaders. John Stott said, "Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us (leading us to faith and worship), we have to see it as something done by us (leading to repentance)" (Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 59–60).
- Every one of us has a little Pharisee in us that would love to make us think we're good, we don't need anything, I have enough righteousness to be accepted before God. These are tendencies we must constantly die to.

Now as we wrap up, it's important to see the heart of Jesus in all this. Though He's pronouncing woes of judgment, He's doing so with a heavy heart. He loved these guys. He's not happy that He gets to come down on them. There's grief and sadness over their rebellion and sin.

We serve a gracious God that wants none to perish, even the likes of these hypocritical leaders.

### 3. Grief Over their Failed Submission – 23:37-39

**23:37 - *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"***

Remember in Luke 19:41 when Jesus drew near Jerusalem He wept over the city. He was grieved that they were not willing to receive Him.

And what a great picture of what Jesus wanted to do for them. He wanted to bring these people to Him as a hen puts her chicks under her wings. This speaks of protection, care, provision, love, etc. He had nothing but blessing for them. And the only thing that stood in their way of receiving that was their own will. They did not want to submit to Jesus as their Lord.

- This verse makes very clear that there is human responsibility in salvation. God does 100% of the saving, but we must be willing to come to Him and receive what He is offering to us by His grace.

**23:38-39 - See! Your house is left to you desolate; <sup>39</sup> for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ”**

Sin and rebellion only bring destruction. Their house will literally be left desolate (this will happen in 70 A.D. when the Romans invade and sack Jerusalem).

- From this point on Jesus will no longer minister to them as a group. He’ll no longer speak to the crowds. They will be left desolate; empty.
- That’s truly the condition when Jesus is absent. It’s only through Jesus, and coming under His love, care and protection, that we can experience life, peace and fulfillment. Desolation or joy in Jesus? What’s your preference? Keep drawing close to Jesus and enjoy the life He has for you.

But there is coming a day when wayward Israel will call upon Jesus. This will happen at His second coming when they will have new understanding and they will recognize Jesus as their Messiah.

They will be willing then to submit to Him and call out, ***blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.***

- **Zechariah 12:10**, “*And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.*”

“In this chapter we not only see Christ’s *condemnation* pronounced *on* sinners, but also His *compassion* expressed *for* sinners. Jesus longed for Jerusalem’s salvation, and Luke’s Gospel even records that Jesus wept over the beloved city (19:41). We too should feel compelled to reach out to sinners in need.

Today there are literally billions of people in various places in the world who are giving themselves to sincere religion, and they genuinely believe they are honoring God (or whatever gods they worship). But they are deceived and they are headed to eternal damnation. From the wealthiest of the wealthy to the poorest of the poor, to every tribe, tongue, and clan in Africa, and to every other people group on the planet, let’s give our lives and our churches to passionately proclaiming the supremacy of Christ’s glory. Such a King deserves so much more than outward religion.” <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Platt, D. (2013). *Exalting Jesus in Matthew* (D. L. Akin, D. Platt, & T. Merida, Eds.; p. 310). Holman Reference.



Points to Ponder:

1. What's going on inwardly in your life? Are you covering up sin in a hypocritical attitude or confessing it to the Lord in humility?
2. Is your sense of righteousness a matter of outward obedience, or inward surrender to Christ?
3. Do you have a heart of grief for people that are not walking with Jesus? Does your heart break for the lost? May we pray for that attitude and be used of the Lord to lead people to Him.