

Matthew Lesson 23

Matthew Chapter 23

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Memory verses for this week: *Luke 4:4 And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.*

Introduction: In last week's lesson, we studied about the parable of the marriage feast and then examined Christ's response to the Herodians, Sadducees, and Pharisees. This week, Jesus confronts the professional 'clergy' of the day.

These men were scribes and Pharisees. His main charge was that "they say, and do not." They were hypocrites. Again, remember these events took place in the final days of our Lord's ministry. Verse 1 of the next chapter clearly implies that this charged sermon took place at the Temple, the very seat of official Israel and Judaism. It was Jesus' clear and final acknowledgment of His rejection by His own people (John 1:11).

I. The Marks of a Pharisee

Mat 23:1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,

Mat 23:2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

Jesus spoke to the multitudes along with His disciples. The scribes and Pharisees were also present and the primary target of the stiff correction due to the fact that they were the problem. Scribes were professional reproducers of the Scripture and therefore considered themselves to be experts.

The Pharisees were the rabbinical interpreters of the Law who prided themselves in fulfilling the tiniest minutia thereof. Matthew records, *"Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples saying, 2 The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat."*

The time likely is still the Tuesday of Jesus' final week. The thought is how the scribes along with the greater Pharisee party presumed to speak for Moses in interpreting the Law of Moses. Notice Jesus described them as sitting in Moses' **seat**.

The word so translated (*kayedra kathedra*) refers literally to a 'seat' or 'chair.' However, in its broader sense, it referred to the exalted seat occupied by men of eminent rank or influence such as teachers and judges. (Of interest, this is where

the modern term *cathedral* came from.) The scribes and Pharisees sat in the seat of the synagogue where the Law was embellished upon and came to be known as the “Moses’ seat.”

Mat 23:3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

Mat 23:4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

The problem with these ‘clergymen’ was not so much what they taught, for Jesus essentially did not attack their teaching. In fact, Jesus directed the people to do what they taught. Rather, Jesus charge against them was that “they say, and do not.”

Like many politicians down through the years, they put burdens upon others from which they exempted themselves. (Current example is our lawmakers do not have to use Obamacare, but they want to force it on all of the law people.)

The Law itself was a heavy yoke, but the traditions so strenuously insisted upon were added to this yoke.

Act 15:10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

As a matter of fact the rabbis had added 613 rules to the Law, supposedly to ‘clarify’ it. The Pharisees and scribes were the historic instigators of these. However, they themselves found endless loop holes to avoid the burdens they imposed upon others. Though they insisted upon strict observance of these rules publicly, in private they often ignored them.

What they bid, they were instructed to do. However, he warns them to NOT follow after their works. They spoke well, but they did not do the things they told others to do. It comes over very negative when we talk a good talk but don’t walk the walk. It is easy to warn others to do right, and then turn and not do it yourself. Jesus tells them that they would bind heavy burdens upon others, but would not move a finger to bear even one of those burdens.

Matthew Henry didn’t mince many words when he explained the errors of the Pharisees.

We find not Christ, in all his preaching, so severe upon any sort of people as upon these *scribes and Pharisees*; for the truth is, nothing is more directly opposite to the spirit of the gospel than the temper and

practice of that generation of men, who were made up of pride, worldliness, and tyranny, under a cloak and pretence of religion; yet these were the idols and darlings of the people, who thought, if but two men went to heaven, one would be a Pharisee. Now Christ directs his discourse here *to the multitude, and to his disciples* (v. 1) to rectify their mistakes concerning these scribes and Pharisees, by painting them out in their true colours, and so to take off the prejudice which some of the multitude had conceived against Christ and his doctrine, because it was opposed by those men of their church, that called themselves the people's guides.

Note, It is good to know the true characters of men, that we may not be imposed upon by great and mighty names, titles, and pretensions to power. People must be told of *the wolves* (Acts 20:29, 30), *the dogs* (Phil. 3:2), *the deceitful workers* (2 Cor. 11:13), that they may know here to stand upon their guard. And not only the mixed multitude, but even the disciples, need these cautions; for good men are apt to have their eyes dazzled with worldly pomp.

Mat 23:5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

Mat 23:6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

Mat 23:7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

Jesus touched upon their real motives. The Pharisees and scribes enjoyed doing good deeds so that others would see. The *phylacteries* mentioned were little boxes containing verses from the Law which they strapped to their arms and foreheads. The conventional wisdom was that the larger the phylactery, the more spiritual was the wearer.

Such pretentious phylacteries illustrated their lack of spiritual understanding. Rather than hiding God's Word in their heart, they wore it on their head. They reveled in wearing the garb of the 'clergy.' A custom of Judaism was for men to wear a fringe or tassel upon the hem of their garment.

Num 15:38 Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue:

Deu 22:11 Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and

linen together.

Deu 22:12 Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four quarters of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest thyself.

These 'reverends' sewed large, ostentatious fringes, believing the larger the tassels indicated the greater their godliness. Their righteousness was in false externals. Moreover, these clergymen routinely sought the seats of prominence at the Jewish feasts and at the synagogues.

They reveled in being called *Rabbi* out in public. In today's society, that would be similar to being called 'Reverend.' Theirs was a religion of outward externals and they did so pretentiously. They were hypocrites to the core.

The Pharisees did things so that others could see them. Being seen of men and having a good name among men is what so many desire in this life. We rather should choose to please the Lord and not be near as concerned about what 'others' think of us. As the bible so clearly puts it, "*If God be for us, who can be against us?*" (Rom 8:31) The Pharisees would wear scriptures on their arm or forehead to be seen of men. They loved all the important seats and chief positions, and they wanted others to call them "Rabbi, Rabbi". (father)

Mat 23:8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

Mat 23:9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

Mat 23:10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

Jesus rebuked them, teaching only the Messiah should be called Rabbi. There is little difference philosophically between rabbinical, pharisaical Judaism of that day and the Roman Church later. They liked titles, like the clergy of the Roman church today likes to be called *Father*. Jesus taught that only God should be so addressed as *father* in a religious context.

The emphasis upon rites, rituals, and externals along with a professional clergy in their distinct garb is strikingly similar between the two. A big problem with the Pharisees in those fateful days was their emphasis upon externals. They were hypocrites through and through. They wore the garb of the 'clergy.' They passed themselves off as pious men of God when in fact they were bogus to the core. They were religious counterfeits. Jesus called their sham for what it was.

Mat 23:11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

Mat 23:12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Again the principle of the virtue of a servant's heart is presented. The scriptural principle that self-exaltation will eventually bring abasement is set forth. God exalts those, in His perfect time, who humble themselves.

Jas 4:6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Luk 18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

Luk 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Spiritual greatness is not measured in rank or fame. It certainly was not in the phony robes of self-righteousness passed off by the scribes and Pharisees. To the contrary, those great in God's eyes are those who humble themselves to serve others. To the world, a servant's heart is a sign of low social standing. To God, it is a mark of spiritual maturity. In due season, God will magnify such humility. God indeed resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Jesus instructs his disciples concerning the position and attitude that they should have. God is the Heavenly Father, and He only deserves the title of 'Father' or "Rabbi". All of us are brethren, and men should not so be revered in this life. I think of a leading religious group that even today calls their leaders 'fathers'. This is wrong according to verse 9. What will exalt man in God's eyes is when we truly sacrifice and help others. It says that the greatest among you shall be your servant. Many want to be in a place of honor, but few want to serve. God's desire is for us to learn humility and learn to be true servants to others. To abase ourselves requires taking up our cross each day and putting the old man to death and walking in the new man.

II. Jesus Denounces Woe Upon the Pharisees

Mat 23:13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

Mat 23:14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

Pay attention particularly to these upcoming verses. The Lord uses the term woe eight times in this section and calls scribes and Pharisees hypocrites seven times. He accuses them of blocking the way to heaven by their false leadership.

Verses 13-33 form an eight-fold series of woes Jesus placed upon such religious hypocrisy. Notice how the woes remained in the context of His condemnation of the hypocritical pretense made by the religious leaders of that day.

Woe #1:

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

Notice that Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees *hypocrites*. The word *hypocrites* is used in direct apposition for the "scribes and Pharisees." This harsh word *hypocrites* essentially means a 'fake' or a 'pretender.' Jesus charged them with obstructing the way to the kingdom of heaven. Moreover, He clearly implied they wouldn't be there either.

Woe #2:

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation."

Though these hypocrites professed to be righteous and were pious, they would foreclose a mortgage against an impoverished widow without thought. Their public prayers were purposefully long, as a pretense of fake piety.

Notice also how that Jesus clearly implied there will be degrees of punishment in hell. In this case, there would be greater judgment for their pretentious hypocrisy. There is woe coming to those who become a stumblingblock. If we don't teach and preach the truth, and come to God His way, we neither enter there, nor lead others to God. We can fool men, but God knows all about us. The church has an awesome responsibility to tell others about Christ.

Psa 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

Woe is coming to the deceiver... those who devour widow's houses and make a long prayer to be seen of men.

Rom 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

Rom 16:18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Eph 4:14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

Eph 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

2 Th 2:3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

Mat 23:15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

Woe #3:

Jesus reprimanded these for their feverish efforts to make one convert to their cause and yet in so doing made him twice as bad as they were. They would spare no effort to induce one gentile to become circumcised, inducting him into Judaism. However, the proselytes of such teachers often went to even more extremes than their teachers.

Woe to the one who is a proselytor for evil. To encourage others to do wrong is one of the worst things we could ever do.

Titus 1:10 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision:

Titus 1:11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

Titus 1:12 One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.

Titus 1:13 This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith;

Titus 1:14 Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.

Titus 1:15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

Titus 1:16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

2 Tim 3:1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 Tim 3:2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

2 Tim 3:3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

2 Tim 3:4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

2 Tim 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

Mat 23:16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

Mat 23:17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

Mat 23:18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

Mat 23:19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

Mat 23:20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.

Mat 23:21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.

Mat 23:22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

Woe #4:

"Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!"

Jesus reprimanded them for their hair splitting and pettifogging. He called them "blind guides." Upon reflection, such a description quite accurately characterized the spiritual estate of the Pharisees and scribes. If it were not so pathetically true, it would be humorous.

These pompous 'clergy' would allow a Jew to swear generically by the Temple, but if one were to swear by the gold of the temple, he obligated himself to pay such a sum to the Temple. This came back to the endless minutia of the rabbinical traditions. In fact, it was absurd and Jesus thus called them on it.

"Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?" The answer to that question should be apparent.

Again, the Pharisees allowed one to swear by the altar at the Temple. But woe to anyone who would swear by what might be sacrificed thereon. If one swore an oath by a potential sacrificial upon the brazen altar of the Temple, he was obligated to in fact bring it to the Temple as a sacrificial gift.

"Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?"

Jesus went further than calling them blind, He noted them as **fools**. Our Lord's long suffering had come to an end toward the pompous hypocrisy of these. In Matthew 5:34-35, Jesus taught to not swear at all. All their obscurantism about swearing was in vain, for Jesus taught that swearing by itself bordered upon blasphemy. Particularly as they swore by the Temple or of heaven itself, they were swearing by the God of the Temple and the God of heaven.

They came perilously close to taking God's name in vain. Far better it is not to swear by anything at all. There is a great woe for placing material things before God. If something comes between us and our service to the Lord, that effectively is an idol. Absolutely nothing should stand between us serving our Lord and Master.

Mat 6:19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

Mat 6:20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

Mat 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Mat 6:22 The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

Mat 6:23 But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

Mat 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

1 John 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

1 John 2:17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Mat 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Mat 23:24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

Woe #5:

Jesus took them to task for observing the microcosm of the law but of ignoring the macrocosm thereof. They meticulously tithed of the small spices they grew in their gardens such as mint, anise (dill), and cumin. Yet, they omitted the major truths of God's Word such as righteousness, mercy, and faith.

Notice that Jesus did not criticize them for tithing. In fact he said, "these ought ye to have done." Their problem was they saw only the externals and not the greater, invisible, spiritual virtues of true godliness. To be sure, tithing even on such a minor portion of one's income as garden spices was proper. However, they missed the major matters of spiritual truth.

They in effect were filtering out gnats, but swallowing camels. Both gnats and camel were considered ceremonially unclean by the Jews. Therefore, as they focused upon minute details of supposed holiness, they in fact were grossly

polluted by their own, hardened hearts. They could not see the forest for the trees.

Mat 23:25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

Mat 23:26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

Woe #6:

These religious hypocrites were utterly concerned about portraying an outward pious appearance. Yet, they were filthy on the inside. He likened them to the absurdity of washing the outside of tableware, but never cleaning the inside surface where the food was. In fact, Jesus said they were like a cup or platter still full of old, dried, leftover food. Moreover, He described that within them as “extortion and excess.”

The thought is of ethical crookedness and moral intemperance. Though they endeavored to put on a pious front of external religion, they in reality were moral and ethical degenerates. Returning to the analogy of dirty tableware, Jesus directed these blind Pharisees to clean up the inside of their lives. In so doing, the outside would follow suit.

True godliness begins with a new spirit being created on the inside which ultimately works its way to the outside. The religion of the Pharisees was essentially cleaning the outside of a garbage can while leaving the inside filthy.

Woe to those who place outward works above the inward spiritual things of God. God wants the heart pure and clean, not the outward man only. We need to clean the inside up (and that requires repentance and faith in Jesus Christ), and the outside will shine from the inside out.

J. Vernon McGee had this to say on these verses.

This fifth woe pictures the Pharisees with their emphasis on the externals. This is a picture of the average church today that is so busy making the outside of the cup and platter clean. They go through all the ceremonies. They want to have the best equipment. They talk so nice and piously on the outside, but inside they do not deal with sin. In most cases, they do not even like the word *sin*. But all of the external ceremonies cannot clean up their inner corruption. The Pharisees substituted ritual for reality, formality for faith, and liturgy for God.

Don't misunderstand Him. He is not saying that the outside should not be

clean. But you give a wrong impression when the inside is dirty and the outside is not. The place to start is on the inside.

Mat 23:27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

Mat 23:28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Woe #7:

Again, here is a similar condemnation. The professional religionists in the scribes and Pharisees cleaned up the outside so as to be seen by men. However, they were internally revolting. The term "whited sepulchres" basically means whitewashed graves. On the 15th day of the month of Adair, before the Passover each year, the Jews would whitewash all the places where graves were situated.

This was done both to beautify them and to mark the place lest anyone passing over them would occasion Levitical defilement. For this, they cited Numbers 19:16 Ezekiel 39:15.

Num 19:16 And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.

Eze 39:15 And the passengers that pass through the land, when any seeth a man's bone, then shall he set up a sign by it, till the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamongog.

Biblical Judaism by Jesus' day had degenerated into rabbinical Judaism which was nothing more than a hypocritical religion of externalism. As long as one followed the prescribed rites, rituals, and traditions of the rabbis; it mattered little whether they were honest, moral, kind, or just. In fact, the professional clergy, the rabbis, scribes, and Pharisees, often were utterly corrupt morally, spiritually, and ethically all the while remaining in good standing as an observant Jew.

As long as they followed the external rules of rabbinical Judaism, they were considered to be righteous. Thus, they also were afflicted with self righteousness as well.

Mat 23:29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

Mat 23:30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

Mat 23:31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

Mat 23:32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

Mat 23:33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

Woe #8:

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets."

The utter hypocrisy of pharisaical, rabbinical Judaism was made evident as they memorialized the prophets and righteous of old. Even Herod the Great, the paragon of cruelty, immorality, and ungodliness, had rebuilt the tomb of David in his day. In the Kidron Valley, just east of the Temple, was the ornate tomb of Zechariah who had been slain between the temple and the altar. See II Chronicles 24:22. Yet in so doing, they bore testimony to the fact they were the descendants of those who killed the same prophets.

Our Lord continued, *"Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers."* Jesus in effect taunted them. The phrase "fill ye up" is an imperative. In so many words, Jesus said, go ahead and finish what your forefathers started. He urged them to fill the guilt of their fathers to the brim. Go ahead and crucify the Holy One and thus fill up your cup of iniquity.

Jesus effectively ended as John had done earlier in calling them a generation of vipers—snakes in the grass. Jesus' question about them escaping the damnation of hell was rhetorical. The answer was obvious. They would not escape!

Jesus challenged them to do something about Him. No more was He teaching the gospel of the kingdom or even of salvation. He fired broadside after broadside at the hypocrisy of His enemies. The cross was just ahead and He knew it. He spared no words against these wicked hypocrites, the religious leaders of official Israel. Righteous indignation rightly poured forth from our Lord.

To be compared to a grave is pretty sad. You look good on the outside, but inside you are full of dead men's bones. We need to get ourselves lined up and cleaned up by looking to Christ for strength to face each day.

This is a continuation of J. Vernon McGee's comments.

To me this is the most frightening figure of speech which our Lord used. As I said previously, the cup and platter (saucer), clean on the outside and dirty on the inside, picture the average church in our day. But I am afraid that this simile of the tomb pictures the average church-goer—beautiful on the outside, but on the inside they are dead in trespasses and sins. They have a form of godliness, but they deny the power of it to make them new creations in Christ. My friend, until that happens to you, your church membership is null and void; it is nothing but hypocrisy. When I read that over half the population of the United States are church members, I wonder why in public places I see ninety-nine percent of the crowd drinking cocktails, using profanity, and telling dirty stories. We have a whole lot of marble tombs walking around, spiritual zombies, dead in trespasses and sins.

Oh, how He is denouncing religious leaders! And they should be denounced above everyone else. My friend, if you have a Bible-teaching church in your community and a preacher who believes the Book and is trying to teach it, for God's sake stand with him in these days. He needs you, and you need him. Oh, how we need men who believe the Word of God—and live it!

Mat 23:34 Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

Mat 23:35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Jesus then made prophetic utterance of coming events and tied it to Jewish history. He foretold that in the not distant future these same religious hypocrites would martyr and persecute another generation of godly preachers, foremost of whom was the God-man in their midst. This certainly was fulfilled as official Israel persecuted the early church with a vengeance. Stephen was killed at their hands. Simeon, the son of Cleophas, was crucified at the instigation of the Jews. Peter, John, and Paul were scourged in their synagogues.

The chief priests ferociously pursued early Christians from city to city in Saul of Tarsus and others inquisitors. The church at Antioch was founded largely by believers fleeing the persecution in Judea. Jesus said that in so persecuting the early church, they would bring upon themselves the guilt of all righteous bloodshed from Abel, Adam's son, to Zechariah in II Chronicles 24:20-22.

2Ch 24:20 And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you.

He imputes to them the guilt of martyrdom from Cain to the hard-hearted Joash and his minions. The judgment of the generations of righteous blood ranging from Abel through the early church would fall upon them as Titus obliterated Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Mat 23:36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

Jesus clearly spoke the fact that the wrath of God, stored up down the through the ages against such persecution, would be vented against that very generation. Their cup of iniquity was full. That judgement indeed came under Titus with the utter destruction of Jerusalem, its Temple, and its inhabitants.

The mills of God grind slow, but they grind exceedingly fine. God in His perfect time will judge sin! But woe unto those upon whom the wrath of God falls. Better it would be that they were never born.

The woe of damnation upon them for their rejection of God's men and God's word. Not many care about defending God's word today, and standing up for the truth for which it projects and embodies. The word of God doesn't just contain truth, but it is total truth.

Rev 21:7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Rev 21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

John 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

III. Jesus Laments over Jerusalem

Mat 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

The inhabitants of Jerusalem were guilty of stoning the very men that God had sent unto them with a message from Him. In this message, Christ gives an invitation for them to come unto Him for salvation and deliverance. He has such a desire to gather them as a Hen gathers her chicks under her wings. Having grown up in the country on a farm, this has significance to me. I've seen mother hens spread those wings and make a clucking noise as rain began to pour, and those little chicks would run under her wings. Sometimes 20 or 30 from one hen. I've also seen them protect them from cats and dogs. Oh how Jesus wanted the lost Jews to turn to Him that he might protect them. But they refused and would not come to Him.

Mat 23:38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

In concluding this devastating condemnation against His own people, Jesus lamented with deep pathos how Jerusalem had repeatedly and violently rejected God's gracious and merciful attempts to bring it to repentance. His tone dramatically shifted from the righteous indignation against the hypocrisy of official Israel to poignancy of what was coming.

Our Lord's heart ached as He with sorrow recalled the prophets sent from God being martyred by the leadership of Jerusalem. He compassionately recalled how He as God would often have gathered His people from danger and trouble like a hen protects her chicks. And yet He noted, they would not! They refused.

Even more ominously, Jesus foretold, "*Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*" The word translated as **desolate** (erhmov *eremos*) is more commonly rendered as 'wilderness' or 'desert.' Such regions certainly abounded to the south and east of Jerusalem. Jesus sorrowfully foretold the impending desolation to come upon Jerusalem about a generation later.

God's wrath would soon be unleashed against His own people through the Roman general Titus. When he was finished, Jerusalem in many ways had become as a wilderness.

Mat 23:39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Jesus leaves their house desolate as God blinds their eyes to the truth. He came first to the Jews, and they would not. But all those that do come, they will be blessed.

Jesus, in cryptic fashion, foretold that they would not see Him again (in the Temple) until they cried out, *"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."*

He was referring to how He would someday return to the Temple in power and great glory at His second coming. Two days thereafter, He would hang upon the cross looking down upon the Temple. But Jesus never entered therein again.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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