

Matthew 23:1–39

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- [0 : 0 0] Again, that's Matthew 23, 1-39. Please stand for the reading of God's Word. Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do.
- For they preach but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.
- They do all their deeds to be seen by others, for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.
- But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one father who is in heaven.
- Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.
- [1 : 1 4] But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces, for you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter go in.
- Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.
- Woe to you blind guides who say, if anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.
- You blind fools, for which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, if anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.
- You blind men, for which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? So whoever swears by the altar swears by it, and by everything on it.
- [2 : 2 1] And whoever swears by the temple swears by it, and by him who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God, and by him who sits upon it.
- Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness.
- These you ought to have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.
- You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.

[3 : 50] Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents and brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.

See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning, and a special welcome to those of you who might be visiting with us today, especially those who are looking for a church home.

[5 : 27] We pray that the word of God, the spirit of God, the people of God, would encourage your heart and that you would return and consider making this your family.

For most people, both Christian and non-Christian alike, there's a lot to like about Jesus, regardless of how many likes you're willing to assign on your social feed to those who follow him, in particular his church.

It's true of Jesus generally. There's a lot to like. And it's especially true even in the words that are before us today. Let me just give you three things worthy of liking from the reading.

Did you catch his call to humility, his extended disdain for hypocrisy, and his love and lament for the city?

I mean, the chapter just unfolds in that way in reverse order, his lament for the city. Well, he shares that with us, does he not?

[6 : 40] Verses 37 to 39, his disdain for hypocrisy, verses 6 through 36, his call to humility, all these things so likable about Jesus, which really then leads me to what I want to convince us of this morning.

Jesus is a leader worth following. He is a king worthy of our service. Anybody here looking for a leader worth following?

Just think of it even in our political realm. Doesn't it capture the desire of the nation's heart to find somebody that would rise to a level that we would unreservedly serve the agenda and the aims without reservation, that we would be able to follow?

It's not only true in the political realm, it's true in the religious realm as well. Aren't we waiting and looking and hoping for someone that's worthy to follow, that we can get behind and serve?

I'm here to tell you today that Jesus is that leader that's worth following. He is that king that's worthy of all our serving.

[8 : 16] Take a look at the way it begins, this wonderful and likable characteristic of him, his call to humility, verses 1 to 12.

The concern in those verses is especially for religious leaders, not political leaders. He's looking for church leaders who are worthy of following.

And we know that because he opens in verse 1 and 2 there, addressing in discourse to the crowds and the disciples something concerning the scribes and the Pharisees, these ones who were appointed as the leaders for the community of faith.

He has something to say about them. And what he actually infers is that they sit on Moses' seat. It's a very interesting little phrase.

It probably goes all the way back to the book of Exodus where Moses, who was God's man, God's leader, would sit all day long, expounding the law and helping people understand the word, that they would relate rightly to God and to one another.

[9 : 33] In other words, Moses had this authoritative position. And so by way of metaphor, these scribes and Pharisees, these church leaders, they were in the appointed place of authority.

They sat in his seat. But it's actually more than a metaphor. You'll find as early as the 4th century in the synagogues of the ancient Near East, a stone seat from which the law would be taught.

And so he's addressing spiritual leadership in his own household. He's got two problems with these leaders, though.

First, they seem to be all talk and no action. That's the way he puts it there. The end of verse 3. For they preach but do not practice.

They tie up heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. All talk.

[10 : 37] Do what they say because as they actually teach the word, they're teaching that which is authoritatively correct, but don't do what they do.

They're preachers but not practitioners. He's disappointed in the leadership, spiritual leadership of his own day.

These are individuals who say one thing but do another thing. Not only that, but he says they're all show as well.

All talk and all show. All talk, no action. All show, no willingness to actually get low. You can see that there. Verse 5 through 7.

They do all their deeds to be seen by others for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long and they love the places of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplace and being called rabbi by others.

[11 : 47] They were all about the external show of life, the derivatives that came with their office, the perks that came with the profession.

In particular, it's noticed in their clothing and in their seats and in their titles, their clothing. This word phylacteries, I mean, we're not reading that one every day, are we?

But there's this notion in the Old Testament that you would write the prayers down that you were to be teaching everyone as they go along day by day.

And Deuteronomy 6, you know, what is it we're supposed to love the Lord? You're going to teach these to your children. And these guys began to write these little prayers down and put them in boxes like Exodus 20.

And some of them would even wear these things around their head like a headdress with three little boxes to let you know that they were willing and ready and able to teach you how to relate to God in any situation along the way.

[12 : 54] He said, oh, they love that kind of thing. They had a lid that was something they were proud of. They liked the best seats.

You know, when I was younger, I served in a church and we've gotten rid of that. A lot of this stuff that's not as prevalent today, but there used to be in some churches, you know, the big chairs on the platform.

I used to call them the Pharisees' chairs, the Pharisaical chairs. Our church had five of them. One was pretty big. They were straight backs, incredibly uncomfortable. I never fell asleep while I was sitting in one because it just, they weren't like the ones you're sitting in now.

But the middle chair was the biggest of chairs and nobody sat in the biggest chair except for the senior pastor, but all of us younger associates, we would sit in the other ones and there was that sense of, I'm up front.

I must be important. These men loved those kinds of seats. They loved the greetings. They loved the titles.

[14 : 09] They loved the letters behind the name. Jesus is very disappointed in this. And so by way of contrast, he is now indicating his call for those who are going to come after him and replace this entire world of leadership.

And we still need it today, don't we? Today we see the same kind of thing on every hand. We don't have the seat of Moses anymore, but all that really means is the word session.

I don't know if you've heard of that. The session of Christ is a theological term that Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father. His session is his authority, his seat.

Did you know that we actually call our board of elders here this session? That's the appointed leadership. Jesus is saying to the men of the session of this church this morning, he's saying to the men and women who have been appointed as the deacons here this morning, he's saying to those who have some visible manifestation of leadership in this family, oh, you're not to be like the ones of my own day, that we're all talk, no action, all show, no go.

I'm aware, and so are you, of men and movements that cause people, many people, to turn away from entering into the kingdom. Just this last few months I've seen it again, prominent places, prominent pastors, historically significant churches, with all the dry rot of its leadership finally emerging from the embers of what looked like something that was doing something well for God's people.

[16 : 14] This is why so many people aren't coming back to church, is it not? I mean, let's concede this, that some of the reason that the church is having difficulty making headway into the culture in which we're living isn't because the external culture is taking us down, it's the internal leadership that hasn't yet learned this is the kind of thing he wants, he says, I want humility and service, I want something different than what you are seeing.

Let me put it to you this way, self-elevation is ugly, it is always ugly, it's unbecoming, it's bad form, and by contrasting the Pharisees of his day with the pastor-like leaders he's going to replace them with in his church, he is in a sense saying don't let their model of life be the mold from which your ministry is poured.

That's what he's saying. What he wants is church leaders to exemplify humility and service. It's what he wants from us, it's what he wants from me, it's what he wants for you.

He wants this church to be exemplified in ways that present leaders that are worthy of following, who say one thing and do it, who are not unwilling to do anything but to be the servant of all, to do away with the public external significances of title, to be ministers, really servants, in his body.

is what you just call ethos. The adornment of our life must match the profession of our faith.

[18 : 17] I'm saying it to me, I'm saying it to anyone here who is on the board of elders, I'm saying it to you if you're a deacon or I'm saying it if you're a community, I'm saying it if you're just sitting here.

Why? Because look at the address, verse one, he said to the crowds and his disciples, this is what the pastor and the people ought to be and if this neighborhood is going to catch the glorious winds of the gospel we profess, it will be because, in part, we have a church that understands humble service.

but let's sit on this just for a minute.

These words in verses 11 and 12 and I encourage you to put your eyes on them again, the greatest among you shall be your servant, whoever exalts himself will be humbled, whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

These words are a foretaste of what Jesus is getting ready to demonstrate later this same week. He's going to humble himself to the point of death, even death on the cross.

[19 : 31] He's going to serve the church family by making atonement for their sin. He's going to have forgiveness to offer because he was a substitute for their inability to live as he wanted.

And so he is both one who does what we cannot do for ourselves and one who exemplifies all we ought to do in him.

What a foretaste here. Probably these words given on the Tuesday or the Wednesday of the week. Remember he had the triumphal entry on the Sunday. By Maundy Thursday he's at the Lord's table.

By Good Friday he's on the cross. By Sunday he's resurrected. But right there in the most tumultuous week of his life filled with ministry appointments in the temple he stops to say the church that I'm building is going to have a leadership and a congregation that is different than the one that I'm seeing here today.

Humble service. It's a call for us. It's a call to integrity. It's a call to authenticity. It's a call to service. It's a call to laying down your life.

[20 : 42] Let me put it to you in the good news. Jesus is a humble king worth serving. And those of us who claim to follow him must exemplify that.

There's more here though. There's more good things about Jesus here than simply the way he reorients life in his family. I love this.

He expresses your disdain for hypocrisy. Verses 13 to 36. I mean look at verse 13. There's a shift. But woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites.

There's a shift in audience. He's no longer speaking to the crowds and the disciples. He's speaking directly to a subset of persons. And while the call to humility goes out to his own this scathing scathing rebuke on their hypocrisy goes out to these group of people.

Glant your eyes down the section. I'm not going to go through them all. Just glance your eyes down the list. It's a long list of woes.

[21 : 56] Woes. And it's not a woe in the sense of be warned something might happen to you. It's a prophetic woe in the sense of I am pronouncing now the judgment that is yet coming to you.

Done deal. Already over. A long list of woes. And they're all directed against the religious establishment or some members of the religious establishment of his own day.

It's quite an extended run. Do you know what I mean by run? A run is a rhetorical device that makes use of repetition in order to persuade through the power or sheer force of that repetition.

That's a run. You'll hear these often in preaching. A preacher will go on a run. And the run is much like a poet. And a poet will lay down a line but rather than just leaving it there he's going to lay down a line that is like it but not it.

And then he's going to lay down a third line so that the listener feels the waves of the line and the lines and the lines upon the lines so that the power and force the rhetoric the persuasive ability of it falls on the listener.

[23 : 17] That's what Jesus done here. It's a long run. It's a seven fold run. Now in preaching class they told us not to do seven. In fact in Jesus' day had he read Cicero he would have been told that in one sense you don't take your argument to the furthestmost point.

You only go as far as you need to go and then you move on. Or later Quintilian would say that this argument is not saying less than one ought to say but not saying more.

And by all appearances it looks as if Jesus is just saying more than he really needs to say. I mean he's laying it on thick isn't he? He's stacking stone upon stone upon stone until it's seven high and you wonder how long you're going to go.

I've heard preachers do this. I've been in places where they go from A to Z literally. I want to talk about God who's adorable and did you know he's beautiful and he speaks to all those who are called and he's delightful and all of a sudden you're like he's going to go all the way from A to Z and at some point there's a diminishing return.

And I'm sure maybe even when you heard that reading today you wondered is he just going on too long? Well possibly but I think when I read it and hear it read he just flattens the listener under the sheer weight of the indictment.

[24 : 53] I've seen TV live courtrooms where horrific horrific indictments are read and they're going to read out every indictment for every individual who's been injured or killed through the disastrous activity of the one and as they read it and they read it every name everyone the sheer weight is almost unbearable.

That's what he's doing to this group. you know the seven fold woe mirrors their seven times resistance and rejection of him since he entered the city a couple days before the triumphal entry.

I went back and looked at it this week seven times they were indignant with him that he would take the many children and they were entangling him in three times with their words and they were questioning him on his authority.

We've just seen seven fold accusations against him and he mirrors what we have gone through even in this sermon series over the last few weeks.

But in one sense even though there are seven here you could almost envision this as couplets. I mean the first and the second seem to go together. You know they're keeping the many from entering into the kingdom meanwhile while they go after the one and seek them down all over the earth.

[26 : 38] In the middle one with the temple and the mint and the tithing they're majoring in the minors and the couplet roles and the last two the external and the internal the whitewash and what you're doing I mean in one sense it is a run of three but it's a potent three.

And then the culminating one verses seven to the close of verse 36 this indictment now read the judgment now given and notice the judgment upon these men actually includes hell which is a sign for them a sign to them.

Does it come as a surprise for you to see Jesus speaking like this? I mean let's concede something our general conception of Jesus and why we like him is he talks about love.

That judgment is not a big thing but maybe we're assuming things we haven't read the record. Jesus makes strong judgments.

Jesus actually indicates there's a hell. Jesus actually says let me tell you something about the people for whom that hell is reserved. Does that bother you?

[27 : 56] You know a lot of people think that they don't like the God of the Old Testament because they say he's a God of judgment but oh they like the God of the New Testament because there you get Jesus he's a God of love.

But what are we reading here? Jesus is bigger than our narrowly defined perspective.

In fact Peter will pick up on this in Acts 10 42-43 he will actually indicate what their preaching consisted of that is the apostolic preaching was that the Old Testament presented God as forgiving.

He was looking over sins for a long time but the New Testament presents Jesus as the judge and now that Jesus has come as the judge you have to repent. So the apostolic preaching is if you want to talk about the love of God go to the Old Testament where he put up with a ton of stuff but you want to talk about judgment and a God where wrath is coming and hell is real?

Well let's go to the New Testament and let's go to Jesus. How did we start reading the Bible so poorly? I don't know but this actually is here. Jesus is correcting a misconception about himself.

[29 : 16] I'm glad to see that. I mean come on let's think about it. Don't you want religious teachers to be held accountable for the licentiousness of their lives?

Don't we actually need a king that can make judgments? Don't we need someone who can separate chaff from the wheat? Do you really want to spend eternity with people that reject his rule and will do you in?

Aren't you looking for protection from that? You know Dante's Inferno written in the 14th century part one of his divine comedy this epic poem he actually lists eight levels for hell.

Whether he's right or not I don't know it's a work of fiction but I like it anyway. And you know what the eighth level is reserved for? It's reserved for fraudsters and panderers and hypocrites or what he calls the the simoniacs the ones who in the religious world really weren't who they said they were and the judgment for those people at the eighth level I mean there's only one level beneath it and that's where you find Satan.

So the lowest level of punishment or the most extensive level of punishment is for men who would claim to say I know God I want to teach you about God but in actual fact they live a lie.

[30 : 42] He says those Dante envisions them as standing on their head their head in a stone bowl their feet upwards to the sky suffering the everlasting torment of flames upon the soles of their feet.

Well this is according to Jesus men he says you got blood on your hands blood you got the blood all the way from Abel who was the first guy murdered in the Bible to the blood he says here of Zechariah the son of Barakai which is most likely the last one murdered in the Old Testament scripture.

He's saying you got it all. Blood is on your hands judgment is coming hell is reserved for you. What an indictment.

There's a warning here. there's a warning here for us. It's especially pertinent to pastors teachers elders deacons church leaders but it's a warning that extends to all of us.

According to Jesus there is a final judgment coming hell will be real some will be assigned there and they will be those who don't get a hold of what he was actually trying to accomplish with his own work.

[32 : 09] Hey let me put it to you this way isn't it good it's good news to be forewarned because to be forewarned is to be what to be forewarned is to be thank you my right side is awake to be forewarned is to be forearmed it's coming let me put it to you this way two movements in the text I'm almost done Jesus is a humble king worth serving but Jesus judgments as a king are worth heeding and then the third unit he shares your lament over the city which I'm going to say his lament as king is worth your investigative following did you see the last couple of verses in the text oh

Jerusalem Jerusalem now the whole discourse is clear the whole chapter is a long speech addressed to three different units crowds and disciples called to humility scribes and Pharisees a disdain for your hypocrisy and now he changes again and speaks directly to the city and he speaks of his love and his lament and his leaving he's going to leave the city Jesus shares our lament over the city but let's be clear Jesus was talking about Jerusalem not Chicago Jerusalem as a city had a particular role in the plan of God it was the place from which his king would enter and rule Chicago never pretended to be anything like that now I hope you have a lament for this city I hope you love this city I hope you give yourself to this city but this love that he's speaking of here and this lament that is here is unique

Jerusalem was supposed to be the place where the king entered in and was received and what we have found is that Jesus has entered in as king and he's resisted and he's rejected and so he says to them oh how often I would have gathered you together as a children and gathering her brood under her wings I love you is what he's saying yet you were unwilling to love me then he says see your house is left to you desolate desolate this whole temple structure this whole way of relating to God is just not going to work he's basically saying Ichabod on a whole way of coming into a relationship with God this is no longer going to be the way you meet God the house is desolate which itself was the fulfillment of the prophetic discourse both of Isaiah in chapter 1 verse 7 and of Jeremiah in chapter 7 where God was going to lay waste desolate his own place so that he could then come as the ruler and the king and the one worthy of following and so what

Jesus is saying here midway through holy week is I've been in the temple now but I'm departing and you will not see me until you hear the song again blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord that wonderful line from Psalm 118 it's the line that the children sang over him just a couple of days before at their entry it's the line that he referred to it is the hallel song back to Pastor Pace's opening it is the final hallel psalm Psalm 118 that they will sing on Maundy Thursday blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord and Jesus prophetically indicates I'm gone from this place this place will no longer be the way you relate to God the leaders from here are completely destined to hell in regard to what they've done with the word of God and I'm going to replace that with myself and you will sing on that

Thursday night with that Passover meal in place blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord in fact it's the last psalm they're going to sing before Jesus himself goes out having sung into the garden of Gethsemane where they will find him and they will see him and they will grab him and they will kill him they will reject him and yet through him your sins are atoned for your ruler is raised and there are there are great things to think about in regard to him well I opened with our longing to find a leader worth following someone that you could get behind somebody that you could serve and feel good about and I've tried to say Jesus is worth following Jesus is worthy of serving he will call us to humility he shares our disdain for hypocrisy he understands our lament over a religious world that no longer actually speaks of the glories of his name and so let me press it home are you following him if not who you got anybody better than him can you see him as the text closes he's retreating from the temple he's departing from the city his back is to you now his small band of followers are going with him he will now entertain with them private discourse and a meal before the betrayal comes are you with him or are you yet in the city under the authority of your own making lord have mercy our heavenly!

[38 : 41] Father we come to you and as we do we encounter Jesus he is massive in this text and he has called us to a certain life he has warned us of an unfortunate end he has provided for us a different way of relating to you thank you that in him we have a building not made by hand lord give us strength that we might as one voice say so be it let it be amen and amen