

Matthew 23:16-24

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[0:00] The syntax of this passage, but deep into its implications.! So I'm fixing to get myself in trouble.!

Hypocrisy, and first, let's go to him in prayer. Oh Lord our God, will you do the work in our hearts that only you can do?

By your Spirit, will you conform us to our Lord Jesus Christ? Will you kill our love for lesser things and knit our hearts to him?

We pray that in his name. Amen. Matthew chapter 23 comes in the middle, in the midst of Holy Week. In fact, this is the final thing he is going to say publicly.

Chapter 23. Everything past this that he teaches will be privately to his disciples. He has ridden into the city as a king, and the crowds have hailed him that way.

[1:27] He's walked into the temple and acted as if he owns it. And the religious leaders have opposed him because of all this.

He's a threat to their position and authority. But as he debated them in chapter 22, they kept on being silenced. And after he silenced his opposition, he turned to the disciples, his own disciples, and to the crowds who were hanging on to his words.

And then of the Pharisees, whom he had just silenced, he said, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

And that's the theme here of chapter 23. Think about that. Jesus does not level his harshest criticisms at pagan Rome or notorious sinners or any group outside of Israel.

He speaks against self-righteous religious pretenders. And last week in verse 1 of chapter 23, we noted that the most important piece of context here is that, his audience.

[2:49] He's addressing his own disciples and the crowds who are following him. What does he tell them in verse 3? He's not even really talking to the Pharisees. He's saying, You do not follow their example.

So when he gets to these woes, verse 13 and onward, yes, he's pronouncing judgment on the Pharisees, but he's also warning his own followers, you and me, that we will be tempted to follow their example.

And so last week in the first two of the seven woes, Jesus showed us that hypocrisy springs from a heart of pride. And this week, Jesus will show us two ways that hypocrites and hypocrisy miss the point of the Christian religion.

The first of those appears in verse 16. Read with me. 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 of the temple that has made the gold sacred? You say, If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing.

[4:06] 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 everything on it.

And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and him who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it. Now you might be wondering, why are we talking about this?

Right? In the middle of Holy Week? Right? Already the cross of Christ casts a long shadow back over these conversations.

Doesn't that demand our attention? Not the technicalities of oath making? Right? Shouldn't he be talking about something more relevant?

Why is this on the agenda? And frankly, I think that's Jesus' point. Why are you dealing with this? [5:11] Why is this what you people are talking about? Why are you giving attention to this? What's really going on here as he's looking at how they are conceiving of oath making?

You know how on the schoolyard, kids, they have their fingers crossed behind their backs? They didn't really make that promise? Maybe you went to a better school than me.

This is the adult, the Pharisee version of that. Making non-binding oaths. Cloaked in religious language.

So, they're weasels, right? And they're using the language of the temple and the altar, the things of God.

And I'm out of bed. Nope, here I am. Okay. They're subordinating God's, the things of God and God's priorities. Even using the temple of God for their own ends.

[6:13] And that's why it's a big deal to Jesus. That's why he's talking about it. They're using, slandering even, God and his things for their own ends.

The temple, the word of God. And is that how we ought to use the word of God? That's a softball, right? We didn't get to talk about it much, but at the end of chapter 22, Jesus asked the Pharisees, what do you think about the Christ?

Whose son is he? They said to him, the son of David. And he said to them, how is it then that David in the spirit calls him Lord? Just that David in the spirit bit.

What is the Bible? What is it? It's the religious text of the Christian church, right? That's its function. But what is it? What is the thing in itself? Why is it our text and not some other religious work like mere Christianity?

[7:21] When we open the Bible, we're not simply reading the religious musings of a bygone era. Are they the words of men? Certainly. Jesus said as much.

David wrote that song. They're his words. But David did not speak on his own. He spoke in the spirit. That is, God, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the triune God, guided David to chronicle these words for God's people.

We have a book from heaven. The words of the living God. And it is not meant for us to do what we feel with it. If God is who he says he is, the Almighty, the beginning and the end, the creator, the one to whom all praise and obedience is due.

And if this is his word, I don't get to set the priorities. He does. I don't get to use the scriptures and the things of God from my own ends.

I submit to the Bible, his priorities. So, do we do something similar to the Pharisees? Do we bring our own priorities to the scriptures?

[8:33] Do we come and say, how can I find that thing I already like? How can I confirm my own preferences? How can I make this undergird the spirit of this age?

My culture is idols. And since nobody actually asks those questions, at least I've never met someone who would ask that question, right? Be suspicious when you go to the scriptures and find it reinforcing what you already like.

I don't get to set the priorities. He does. But the Pharisees are beginning with their priorities. How can we continue being weasels, right?

When I set my priorities first, I necessarily miss the point of the scriptures. So, I shouldn't be surprised when I get it all wrong.

And that's the point of verse 17. You blind fools, for which is greater? The gold of the temple that made the gold sacred. Verse 19. You blind men. Verse 22. Whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and him who sits upon it.

[9:37] When we use Christianity and the things of Christ to support our priorities, well, when we begin with foolishness, don't be surprised when we end there too.

Now, oath-breaking is probably not big on your list of current events. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't think that's high on your list of priorities today.

But the real issue is that we still do this, right? We still bring our priorities and our preferences to the Bible and subordinate God to us.

The times have changed, but people haven't. And again, we're not looking for hypocrisy outside the church. If we were, we could look to Hollywood or Washington.

But that's not what we're doing. Because Jesus is taking aim inside, among the people of God. So, let's look inside the church. And just to get our feet, right?

[10:40] Let's start off with the easy stuff. Remember, we're on a hunt today for golden calves. These are the easy-to-spot golden calves. Now, America seems to really like its left-right polarization right now.

I don't know if you've noticed. But, so for the time being, let's run with that. Again, this is just the easy stuff that we're about to point out, right? Both the left and the right do this.

Use the things of God to support their priorities. Both, right? So, some on the left are champions of the LGBT movement. Now, if your chief priority is LGBT affirmation, you will subsume your other priorities to it.

So, what must you do with the Bible? You'll say some variation of, the Bible doesn't mean what it clearly means about this. And you'll use God's word as a servant to your true goal.

Serving the spirit of the age. The apologist Francis Schaeffer said, tell me what the world is saying today, and I'll tell you what the church will be saying in seven years. When we start with our priorities, God's priorities come second.

[11:58] Hypocrisy happens when I set the agenda. Likewise, some on the right can reveal what their true priorities are.

And it often has more to do with being on the right than it does with the gospel. For instance, this fall, President Trump appointed Paula White to lead the White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative.

That's a committee that's a holdover from the Bush and Obama presidencies. Now, the name Paula White might not mean very much to you. You won't find her books in the back where we have provided resources for Shoreline.

That's because she's a heretic. She preaches the prosperity gospel. Quick note. There's a difference between heresy and error. Error is on secondary issues.

Heresy is on primary issues. They are damnable errors. That is, if you believe these errors, errors specifically about the nature of God who he is, or the gospel, you are not a Christian and you are still separated from God.

[13:08] We can tell the Presbyterians they're wrong about baptism, and we can still worship with them. Sorry, guys. But, so, back to this.

So, the true gospel of Jesus Christ is simply that Jesus died as an atonement for my sins and yours, and rose from the grave so that we could be reconciled to God as the free gift of his grace for all who repent and believe.

The prosperity gospel is a bastardization of that, which says that Jesus died and rose from the grave so that if I drum up sufficient faith and sufficient obedience and give a lot of money to the anointed person, that I'll get nice stuff.

Now, the version of the nice stuff varies from teacher to teacher. Some, it has to do with health. Some, it has to do with wealth. Increasingly, some prosperity preachers talk a lot about self-esteem. And Paula White is one of the leading prosperity preachers in America. This is not actually the scandal. Here's the scandal. Shortly after arriving at this post, after her appointment to the President's Administration, she published a religious memoir complete with heresies.

[14:28] And many Christian leaders, including some from our own denomination, endorsed and promoted it.

Why? Many of them happen to also be on the President's Council of Religious Advisors or are vocal supporters of the President.

They were endorsing a politician and abandoning their responsibility to herald the king.

Colin Hansen of the Gospel Coalition says that this reveals that for some evangelicals, theology is really secondary to politics.

When we start with our priorities, God's priorities come second. They have to. Who is Lord when I make my priorities first?

[15:39] Now, remember, in our little hunting trip here, these were the easy-to-spot golden calves. In fact, I don't remember hearing anyone at Shoreline endorsing heretics for their political agenda.

So we're hunting big game here, the difficult stuff. Where do we, you and I, in this room, subordinate God's priorities to our own? Because just like the Pharisees' oaths, hypocrisy happens when I set the agenda.

While we're talking politics, do you believe that God is sovereign, that he powerfully and wisely governs all things?

Do you also act and speak in ways that communicate that if your preferred candidate doesn't win in November, all is lost?

You may only believe one of those things. You must choose. They are completely incompatible. Your non-Christian friends, if you speak that second way, might say, oh, I thought you believed in something bigger than all this.

[17:06] The way we speak this year in this election cycle will reveal our true refuge. Will you speak as someone who trusts God completely or will you speak as one who trusts in human leaders?

You may have only one bedrock. I hope his name is Jesus. Hypocrisy happens when I set the agenda.

That can be things like that, politics. It could also be just about where are you driving off to when you leave here today? Home, probably, right? My agenda with respect to home sounds like how can I make my home more comfortable for me?

When God sets the agenda, he leads us to ask how can I open my home for hospitality?

Regardless of how comfortable it is. Hypocrisy happens when I set the agenda.

Back to politics. Sorry. There's more politics than we've done like the last year. Let's say you're going to vote for one party.

[18:26] Left, right. I'm not telling you how to vote. And you get into a discussion with someone who's planning to vote for the other party. What is your instinct in that moment?

Is your first instinct to see this conversation as an opportunity to sway someone's vote? Is that your chief category?

Or is it an opportunity first and foremost to set forth Christ as worthy and wonderful? Our instincts expose our hearts, friends.

What is, in your heart of hearts, a person's greatest need, really? Are we first politically affiliated?

Or are we first gospel oriented? Do I see people as fundamentally and first connected to the kingdoms of this world?

[19:36] Or do I see them chiefly as connected to one of two spiritual kingdoms? Hypocrisy happens when I set the agenda with earthly things.

And this pops up in our Christian walk as well. When we ask questions like, how far is too far with sin?

Now that could be the classic how far is too far with my boyfriend or girlfriend, or how far is too far with greed or how far maybe in the reverse? How little? What's the least amount of prayer I can get away with and still call myself a Christian?

Each of those is the wrong question because it starts with my priorities of sensuality and greed and spending my time how I would like them.

right? Each starts with my fallen desires and assumes that that is the starting point. What?

[20:45] That would be the starting point? What's God's starting point? It is not how far from Christ can I walk without disaster? It's how close can I walk with Christ?

the assumption the starting point is all wrong when we ask that question. Hypocrisy if I'm asking how far is too far it's a sign that I'm already starting with my own priorities not God God's and hypocrisy happens when I set the agenda.

when I set the agenda I miss the point entirely and I make God my servant rather than the other way around.

That's what verses 16 to 22 are telling us but I said the passage at the beginning that this passage uncovers two ways that hypocrisy happens and causes us to miss the point.

The second one comes in verse 23. 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 guys straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel.

[22:12] First what Jesus is not saying is don't sweat the small stuff. You can look at that because they're tithing out of their herb garden don't worry about that.

We know that he actually is not saying that because he says verse 23 these you ought to have done. God has a comprehensive claim over our lives and his commands reach and touch every part of us.

So Jesus isn't saying don't sweat the small stuff. What is he saying? He's saying that hypocrisy happens first we've already said when I set the agenda and now he's saying hypocrisy happens when we major on the minors.

some of you have told me about past churches that you've been in that though they believe the gospel and preach it they weren't really mainly chiefly about the gospel.

they were known for their culture was about something else something good mostly but something not the gospel.

[23:30] Some of you have told me about churches that at the end of the day the message they really majored in was educate your children this way or husbands date your wives or wives submit to your husbands or discipline your children this way or we advocate for this issue or for that issue or the quintessential Baptist who introduces every sermon right today I have two points about the text and three about believers baptism right are those things biblical I mean there's no verse that actually says husbands date your wives but there is one that says husbands love your wives so I can see how they got there right but there are plenty of churches and I pray that it is not true of us that have lost their way by becoming churches mainly about a secondary issue whether it's about personal piety or whether it's about a family dynamic and one wonders what single people do in a church like that probably attend a different church or whether it's about advocating for a cause they major on something even a good thing that is lesser than what Christ calls the weightier matters and so what are those what are those weightier matters he says justice and mercy and faithfulness which if you worshipped with us on December 29th when Pastor Matt preached from chapter 22 verses 34 and on might sound very familiar to you the weightier matters

Jesus says of the law are justice and mercy well in fact the second great commandment is you shall love your neighbor as yourself justice and mercy the weightier matters of the law are faithfulness the great commandment you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind this is the great and first commandment on these two depend all the law and the prophets he's pointing us back to that center isn't he the whole law of God revolves around these ideas but even in this we can get derailed why is he pointing to these things and saying these two great commandments do these and live friends the two great commandments love the Lord your God with your whole self and love your neighbor as yourself are not the boxes we check to get punch our ticket to heaven the great commandments demonstrate how far we are from saving ourselves by our acts love God with all your heart and soul and mind have you ever obeyed that for a moment let alone your whole life love your neighbor as yourselves we don't even love the people we love as much as we love ourselves the two great commandments aren't a staircase that we climb to heaven they are an avalanche of our own inadequacy collapsing around us the two great commandments will not save us the weighty things of the law condemn us and so that's what Jesus is saying before you look at small obediences tithing your herb garden which you think you have handled look to the great things of the law and see that you have a much bigger problem attend to those weighty matters why because they show us our entire need our whole failure our need for a savior and so friends the church of Christ needs to be founded and rooted and built on

the good news of Jesus Christ who by his cross an empty tomb saves sinners this is the weightiest thing in God's word but we can so easily slide into the era of the Pharisees who over time move secondary things right back into the middle which is how we end up with husbands date your wives churches and the rest social causes churches because we can identify more with something secondary than with

Christ the true Christian life is not advocacy or cultural engagement or community service those are certainly outward expressions and good things but they are secondary things because the Christian life is fellowship with the living God by the redemption of his grace if our advocacy or our family dynamics or anything else becomes the fill-in for true Christianity and the thing that we're mostly about that's a works-paced religion and it's not Christianity and again we're talking about good things here things that the church ought to be about but not centrally if we make a secondary thing the center we've lost Christianity wholesale skip that page

Christ didn't die for us because we championed the right causes he died for us when we were still sinners championing the wrong causes right and why is that for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life not God so loved your political affiliation that he decided to provide rescue not God so loved your performance that he decided to offer up his son not God so loved your advocacy no God so loved the world sinners like you and me and so friends what kind of church are we I don't want shoreline to be the such and such a doctrine church

[31:07] I don't want shoreline to be the discipline your kids this way church or the community groups church or the expository preaching church it's probably how we're best known if we're known at all I don't want if God blesses us with a building I don't want shoreline to be the nice new building church I don't want shoreline to be the pro-life church I want shoreline above all else to be the we preach Christ and him crucified who lives forever and graciously gives himself to all who would repent and believe church all else is second the gospel is not date your wife and live it is not submit to your husband and live the gospel is not vote pro-life and live the gospel is this second corinthians five all this is from

God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation that is in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation therefore we are ambassadors for Christ God making his appeal through us we implore you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God for our sake he made him who knew no sin to be sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God if shoreline has any reputation if it has any culture within its walls I want it to be shoreline oh you mean those people who won't shut up about Jesus and how great he is and what he offers as a free gift to all who would come to him yeah that one what might that look like day by day for us well all those good and secondary things they're good things piety family advocacy they all must be rooted and founded and centered in the gospel we need our obedience to do

God's law to be connected to the gospel right so the way we talk about those things the way we pursue them needs to be shaped and empowered by God's gospel our obedience isn't something opposed unto us it's rooted in and springs forth from the new life that we have in Christ through the gospel and as a community when someone shares that difficult thing that hard thing that suffering thing what is our inclination is our inclination!

Small talk it away basically is our inclination inclination to give them some principles do this that or the other is our inclination to tell them essentially pull yourself up by your bootstraps is our inclination to tell them that real Christians don't feel that way or is our inclination to say let's go to Christ together and find our comfort there and walk with him through this dark valley he's walked it ahead of us and delights to be with his people always the old hymn begins there is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains that is to say there is a spring of forgiveness for everyone who will come it's supplied by the grace of Christ who shed his blood dying in the place of sinners the hymn continues with that same imagery calling the fountain now a stream ever since by faith

I saw the stream thy flowing wound supply friends let this be us redeeming love has been my theme very center and shall be till I die that's my prayer for us all that God's redeeming love would be our

theme now and always hypocrisy happens when I set the agenda hypocrisy happens when I major on the minors even good ones hypocrisy dies where God sets the agenda where the gospel is central where Christ is all in all in redeeming love is our theme friends Christ is all he is the object of our faith and he is our great reward let's pray to him oh lord our god we repent of making anything other than Christ our theme will you root out from us our inclinations to prioritize our own fallen desires to put at the center the kingdoms of this world or the comforts of this world and lord will you capture our souls and show us the unending incomparable beauty of Christ in the gospel so that redeeming love might be our theme as a church body and as believers we pray this in his name amen