

Matthew 23:25-39

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[0:00] Well, good morning. Good morning. For those of you that I don't know yet, my name is Dave.! I'm one of Shoreline's pastors.!

Overcast today, but the sun's coming out. But if I'm not spooked, this will be the last of three sermons in chapter 23. I expect that this will shine a light on some things.

It might be a little uncomfortable again. Sorry. But I also hope that because of Christ's love for his people, that this will be a comfort.

And I hope that by the end today, that this is the most encouraging sermon about hypocrisy you've heard. I hope that for us.

How did we get here? In chapter 21, Jesus rode into Jerusalem as a king. And the crowds shouted to him, Hosanna to the son of David!

[1:28] Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! Remember those words. We'll come back to them soon. And as he entered the city, he went to the temple and said, This is my father's house!

And acted as if he owned it. He cleansed it. And the religious leaders opposed him because he was a threat to their authority. And in chapter 22, there were debates back and forth.

And he shut them down over and over again until he finally silences them. And then in chapter 23, he has turned his eyes to his disciples, and to the crowds who are hanging on his words.

And he says to them, You, verse 3, must not do the works that they do. You must not follow after their example. And so when he begins in verse 13 to pronounce seven woes, and today we will see the last three of the seven woes, on the Pharisees.

Yes, he is pronouncing a judgment on them. But we're not here called. He's speaking to the disciples. He's not calling us to look out there somewhere for hypocrisy.

[2:39] But in here. Because he's speaking to his own followers, to you and to me, and warning us that we can fall into that same trap. So, friends, let's go to him in prayer and ask that his blessing, that we might hear and heed these warnings.

Let's pray. Lord, our God, will you, by your Spirit, show us your Son?

Will you confront our hearts? And, Lord, will you draw us to Christ? Lord, I ask also this morning that you preserve my voice, so that in these minutes I may be clear.

And that your word might be central. We pray that in Christ's name. Amen. Matthew chapter 23, beginning in verse 25.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, you blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

[4:01] 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. In this last section here today of chapter 23, Christ shows us the heart of hypocrisy. Does he know it? Hypocrisy is putting on a show. Pretending on the exterior that things, that we are better than we truly are on the interior.

Hypocrisy is wearing a mask so that the world sees a picture of me that doesn't reflect the reality, who I truly am on the inside. And the Pharisees, practicing a lifeless religion of ritual and rules and reputation, had turned this into an art form, a way of life.

So much so that today, the term Pharisee, right, is virtually synonymous with the word hypocrite, largely in part to Matthew 23.

[5:21] And I think that's also the charge that the world levels against Christians in the church. That we're a bunch of hypocrites. That we falsely play a part like the Pharisees did.

And can't you feel how Jesus is exposing the foolishness of hypocrisy here? Right? Whitewashed tombs, cleaning the outside of the cup, but neglecting the important part, the inside.

Right? It's rot covered over with plaster. It's death covered over with a facade. Hypocrisy is a lie, but we tend to think it's a useful lie.

Right? We have a reputation to uphold. But not only is it a lie, it's a stupid one. Right? It's a lie that God, the only judge, the only person whose opinion really, truly matters, right, he sees right through it.

In 1 Samuel chapter 16, the Lord said to Samuel, the Lord sees, not as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

[6:31] And Jesus sees right through them. He knows that there's a tomb inside, even though the exterior is whitewashed. Right? And let's ask ourselves, how do we look to the one who sees through flesh and bone right to the heart?

How do we look to the one who can look past our smoke screens? How do we look to the one who cannot be distracted or manipulated by our outward shows?

Well, the good news here, verse 26, is that there's a hope for hypocrites. Right? Jesus says there's a way to be clean. First, clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

Now, how does that logic work? How does washing the inside make the outside clean? Behavior, that's the external, the outside, is downstream of the internal, the inside, the heart.

Right? Back in chapter 12, Jesus, speaking again to the Pharisees in words that will sound familiar in a couple verses, said, you brood of vipers, how can you speak good when you are evil?

[7:48] For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. In other words, cleaning the inside produces a clean outside because impurities won't keep spilling out over, over the brim.

Right? Which means that the sins of speech and actions that are sinful aren't the things that we are here to manage, to restrain.

If there's toxic waste in the river, don't just start cleaning up the river. Go shut down the factory that's spilling toxic waste into it. Right? Our words and our actions, they're indicators.

They're gauges. They're like the instrument cluster in a car. Right? You're not going 60 miles an hour because the speedometer says 60. Right? The speedometer says 60 because you're going 60 miles an hour.

Right? And so likewise, we don't swear and lie and speak harshly because of our voice box. Right? Our larynx. Right? They're the outpouring of a sinful heart and the larynx is just the tool we use.

[9:00] Right? To express them. And so even if we took extreme measures, right, and had a surgeon remove our larynx, we would still have hate in our heart or jealousy.

We wouldn't be able to express it but we would still have that internal pollution we, in other words, don't become sinners because of sinful deeds but we express sinful deeds because on the inside we have sin.

James says in James chapter 1, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. And then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death and that testimony there, friends, stands starkly against.

The spirit of this age which says, you know, except for Hitler, right, we're all pretty good. Right? We're all basically good. We're all basically okay but God in his scriptures say no, we're enticed towards sin by our own evil desires.

God in his scriptures say none is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks God. All have turned aside.

[10:18] Together they have become worthless. No one does good. Not even one. Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive.

The venom of asps is under their lips.

Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery and the way of peace they have not known.

There is no fear of God before their eyes. Friends, that is the judgment on all the world. And the Pharisees, and perhaps we, are pretending that it's not true of us.

That they are righteous in their own accord. What ways do we mask our sinfulness? In what ways do we apply the whitewash? I think he's inviting us to ask that question.

How do we whitewash our tombs? How do we paper over the sin that remains? Well, the first and easiest is just to sin privately, isn't it?

[11:22] Behind closed doors. Never let anybody see it. We can have our sin and our sterling reputation. Now, I think it's easier than ever these days to sin privately.

Most of us here today can get a kind of privacy, sorry cadets, that is virtually unknown in human history. Automobiles have spread out homes.

You might not even know your neighbor's name, let alone what's going on with them. Homes are bigger than ever before with fewer occupants and better walls and doors.

You know, screens, little devices, are increasingly personal and private. Digital anonymity gives us the ability to sin in both what we view and consume and what we speak.

But by indulging in private sins, we can keep the world from ever knowing, can't we? And by keeping it quiet, it feels like we've gotten away with it. But we haven't.

[12:30] Christ sees right through this, doesn't he? He knows all. And that's one way that we whitewash the tombs, our reputation, and leave the interior filthy when the outside appears pristine.

Or, I could keep the outside looking clean if I emphasize obedience that's not costly to me.

Right? So if there's a sin that's really easy for me to avoid, or if there's an obedience that is really easy for me to complete, those are easy reputation points, aren't they?

So maybe I'll emphasize those to kind of make my facade look good, right? So for me, personally, I'm not prone to violent anger. outbursts of rage, that's just not a thing for me.

And it's not a product of some hard-fought holiness, like growth in Christ. It's just never been an issue for me and my personality. So if, in my parenting, I keep stressing about, we've got to put anger to death, we've got to put anger to death, it's so, so bad, and make it super important to my children, they'll be like, wow, you know, like anger's really, really important, and dad's got it really, really figured out.

[13:47] He must be super holy. Easy reputation points. Building up that facade, right? We can emphasize obedience that isn't costly, or I can highlight sin that I don't have the opportunity to participate in.

I remember somewhere it was like middle school or high school, I think it was like early high school. I was on a trip with my church youth group. There was another student on this trip who went to my school, and at church events, he seemed very earnest and very spiritual, but I knew what he was like at school, and the two did not match.

He was very much more interested in popularity and in girls, and I remember venting my frustration to someone else on the trip. I was like, man, I can't stand that guy's hypocrisy, and then it struck me.

I was just the same. Inside, I wanted what he had. I just couldn't get it. I just wasn't popular enough to actually participate in the sins in which he was indulging.

If popularity and girls had been available to me, and back then I wasn't quite as desirable, if they had been available to me, I'd have been all over it.

[15:12] I wanted to do what he was doing with his girlfriend, but my unpopularity made me look more holy than I actually was.

I simply lacked access to the sins I desired. So here I was sitting myself up saying, I can't stand that guy's hypocrisy. On the outside, I could play the pious saint, but it wasn't a reflection of my holiness. It didn't show what I was truly like. All it showed was that I was an inept sinner. I just wasn't very good at it. Easy points.

The same can be said of obedience that I find simple and easy. As a factor of my personality, I'm pretty patient.

That's just my default state. I'm not in a rush most of the time. It's not a fruit of spiritual growth, though. And so, if I make a big deal in my preaching to all of you people about like, oh yeah, we really need to be patient people, and like, make that Shoreline's thing, then I'll look really good, but not because of any spiritual growth in myself.

[16:33] There are points I didn't earn. And here's one that I think, that I know, that Shoreline is vulnerable to.

And that is confessing acceptable sins as a smokescreen. Now, Christians are commanded by the scriptures to confess our sins to one another as we journey together in the road of discipleship as a help to each other.

James chapter 5, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. But, but if I'm concerned with my reputation, whitewashing that tomb, this is not a good proposition for me, is it?

It's a tough sell. If I have a big sin, a shameful sin, a culturally unacceptable sin, and I don't want to take the hit for that in my reputation, well, I can confess something smaller, can't I?

Something more acceptable, right? So instead of saying, you know, I'm getting drunk regularly, I can say, I got frustrated with my kids the other day. Yeah, yeah. Instead of saying, I'm using porn, I can say, you know, I'm not praying quite enough.

[17:55] Instead of saying, I'm harboring racist attitudes in my heart, I can say, you know, I'm not finding satisfaction in God quite enough. So there's like a formula to this, isn't there?

This smoke screen. Instead of confessing a big sin, I can find a small sin to confess, one that won't hurt my reputation so much. Or in a true judo move, I can find a small obedience that I have not done enough of to confess, right?

Not only will that not hurt my reputation, it will make me look even better, even holier when people realize, oh man, really attuned to even the small spiritual matters, you know, tithing dill and mint and cumin, right?

What are we doing in that moment? We're painting a tomb. giving the impression that I'm open and humble, wow, this person, you know, they volunteered this when in fact I'm being completely false. Right? Giving the impression that I'm holier than I am. Wow, that person's really concerned about that small sin. They must have the big stuff figured out when really the big stuff is there and I refuse to address it.

[19:12] giving the impression that I'm pious. Wow, they must be really attuned to the things of the spirit to be concerned over such small obediences while I slowly choke to death on my own smokescreen.

Right? And there's like a balancing act to it. What can I confess that makes me look like I take this thing seriously but not so scandalous that, you know, I look unholy?

How can I appear forthcoming without actually being vulnerable? Now, my wife is more intuitive than I am. She's actually the one who kind of pointed this out to me and I realized when she did, oh my goodness, I have been seeing this.

I grew up in the church. I have been seeing this all my life and what's more, I have been doing this all my life. And if you feel like you've just learned a valuable technique, right?

I mean, at first, I was actually kind of weighing, do I mention this? Do I share this? Am I a bad pastor for teaching you a new way to cover your sins? Right? What I realized is a couple things.

[20:24] First, by naming it, I hope I've shown light onto darkness, right? Not put up a sunshade so that, you know, to give sin shelter. And secondly, I doubt that, like myself, I've actually taught you anything.

Like, we don't have to teach our children to lie. We didn't have to go to school to learn self-interest. We have all been hiding sin and shame since Adam first hid in the garden.

Right? So I haven't taught you anything so much as just pointed it out. Third, labeling sin clearly is the way that we steer clear of it.

On a first step in killing it. Right? I can't confess and repent from that which I cannot see. And last, I just trained this whole congregation to be on the lookout for smokescreen confessions.

Right? So good luck trying to pull one up. Now, that's, that's a lot of, like, new hypocrisy. Like, we've been at, this is our third consecutive sermon on hypocrisy and these are all fresh, new hypocrisies.

[21:40] Private sins, obedience that's not costly to me, sin that I don't have the opportunity to participate in, sins that I'm not tempted towards, obedience I find simple and easy, smokescreen confessions and more.

Right? There, there are still fresh breeds of hypocrisy as our Lord digs down deeper and deeper. that should shock us and cause us pause.

Right? And, we've been looking at ourselves, that's where Jesus wants us to look. I also want to talk to parents today because parents have a particular responsibility not to foster an environment in the home that rewards whitewashed tombs and I think it's really easy for Christian parents to do it.

what's the goal of Christian parenting? That's really how we get to this. What's the goal? To conform our children's behavior to a standard or to point them to Christ?

Right? If we get it in our heads the goal of Christian parenting is obedience. We will have a very different attitude towards parenting and towards our children than if our goals in parenting are to encourage our children to love Christ.

[22:56] Now that doesn't mean that obedience and standards are un-Christian in any way. In fact it's important that children see and know the standard. They won't run to a savior unless they need a savior so they can see it.

But is our message behaving you'll avoid consequences? Or is our message behave and you'll get rewards? Or is our message your behavior is well it shows your heart.

A tree is known by its fruit so let's run to Christ. Consequences, discipline, rewards, they're not prohibited in Christian parenting. Not at all.

The scriptures commend both. But just like last week where we saw that hypocrisy happens when we major on the minors. Hypocrisy can also happen when we think that the tools of parenting are in fact the heart of parenting.

So if the tools of parenting aren't joined to a focus on the heart of our children we can teach our children that it's the exterior that counts and we can raise a generation of young Pharisees.

[24:12] Jesus has in verse 29 one last pronouncement of woe on Pharisees. He says to them 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.

Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up them the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you 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 the 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. What's the logic in this? What's his argument? Even though verses 29 and 30 they say they love the prophets who wouldn't have participated in their slaughter because Israel murdered many of the prophets that came there.

[25:38] They are following verse 31 right along with the forefathers. Right? They have rejected the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist. They are opposing currently and seeking to destroy currently the great prophet Jesus of Nazareth.

Right? And so he provokes them verse 32 to show their true colors by bringing this to fruition by following through and then he moves verse 33 through 36 to the judgment.

Nothing false nothing evil will stand before a holy God. But here's something really interesting.

Nestled in the middle of that verse 34 he says something very very interesting. He says I send you prophets.

Friends who sends prophets? prophets? Do kings send prophets? Do the priests send prophets? No.

[26:49] The Lord God Almighty alone sends prophets. He sends them to the kings right? So when Jesus says I send you prophets and in fact he goes out like extra like in the Greek he says like I is emphasized like I myself send you prophets.

He really wants them to hear it. He's making an extraordinary claim. He is the one who sends prophets.

This is the Lord Almighty. Which means first that even if we pull the wool over people's eyes even if I get away with the hypocrisy before you before anybody else in this world the eyes of Christ the audience that truly matters sees into my blood and marrow nothing is hidden from him.

There is no escape from his gaze or his presence. Hypocrisy at the end of the day actually in this very moment is already found out.

Already. So why bother hiding? And second because this is who he is it means that he is able to do something about it which is exactly what he does in verse 37.

[28:26] When he says oh 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 are 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. We've been pointing to these last words in chapter 23 since we got into the chapter.

Why? It's a lament. Jesus has been saying this with tears in his eyes. All of these woes he was not doing with glee he was doing with sorrow.

I love how one pastor put it. He said words like these spoken at such a moment let us see as far as words can into the innermost of Jesus heart.

They are a wonderful expression of his deep seated desire to save from ruin the worst of men to save the unwilling to save the very last.

[29:43] And now if that last line verse 39 sounds familiar it's because it's where we started today. The crowds quoting Psalm 118 as he rode into the city as a king shouted well Matthew 21 verse 9 the crowds that went before him and followed him were shouting Hosanna to the son of David blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord Hosanna in the highest that is they received him as their king.

And friends verse 39 means that the offer is still open. This is how we enter his kingdom that same expression of faith of confidence in him that we would hail him as king run to him for rescue and he will as he said gather us in not because we've sufficiently cleaned ourselves but because of his great love for us.

which is why friends the church is the best place for hypocrites to be hypocrites like you and me because Jesus Christ came to save sinners to save hypocrites nothing false will stand before the holy God but everyone hid in Christ who has run to him for rescue he shields from wrath with outstretched arms on Calvary's cross which is why the gospel friends the gospel is the end of hypocrisy why do we act as hypocrites like what's the purpose what's the point what's the motivation to receive a reputation that we have not earned right that's the whole point of it and who is it that we're trying to impress we know we can't fool

God we're trying to fool other people and you see how this passage just guts that it doesn't two ways I think first the gospel is the end of hypocrisy because here stands verse 34 the God of the universe pleading verse 37 for sinners to come to him for rescue he speaks to us with affection how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings If he is the one who sends the prophets if he is almighty God and that's his heart towards you who else do you need to impress is there some more important audience someone else whose stamp of approval you really need no the gospel is the end of hypocrisy because it undercuts the motive love the bright sun of

Christ's love dissolves it away like mist if hid under Christ's wings God approves of us whose opinion can speak against us you don't need to put on an act because the verdict in the highest court is already in love in Christ Jesus you don't need to strive for the opinions of men and it's silly to try friends look to Christ who looks on you with love and let the flood of his love wash away every need you think you have to hide behind a mask the gospel is the end of hypocrisy not because it

with you into shape but because hypocrisy a search for acceptance well guess what the gospel is the ultimate acceptance Christ spreads his wings over us and draws us near as is on and second the gospel is the end of hypocrisy because again why do we act as hypocrites to receive a reputation that we have not earned we'll get this the gospel is the end of hypocrisy because it does give you a reputation you have not earned one that we could not imagine earning for ourselves what did we sing today behold him there the risen lamb my perfect spotless righteousness right isaiah chapter 61 i will greatly rejoice in the lord my soul shall exult in my god for he has clothed me not i've clothed myself not i've put up a white wash he has clothed me with the garments of salvation he has covered me with the robe of righteousness the sterling the perfect the radiant reputation of christ friends my life is hid with christ my savior my god he clothes me in his robes of white that's the gospel the imputed righteousness of christ so for everyone who is willing who does obey who does say blessed is he who comes in the name of the lord god the holy spirit joins us to christ in his death and his resurrection so that we stand before the father with an invincible spotless righteousness that we could never dream of producing or pretending on our own the gospel is the end of hypocrisy friends because the gospel does give us a reputation that we did not earn and that is the best news that any sinner any hypocrite can ever hear let's pray let's pray let's thank you that you shine a light on the inner pollution every man woman and child but I pray that you would help us not to flinch under that gaze not to try to cover it up shore it up put on pretenses anything like that but that we

[37:06] would run to christ who offers us true righteousness in himself would you help all of us to run to him to take shelter under his wings and to find in him a perfect spotless righteousness we ask that in the matchless name of Jesus Christ our king amen friends now we turn our attention to the lord's supper