

Matthew 23:13-39

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[0 : 00] So, you've heard the passage read? Wowza. These are Jesus' final words in his public ministry.

After this, he's mostly sort of hanging out with his disciples. So the tax collectors and the traditional sinners have been soaking up Jesus, their loving Jesus.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, have been trying to undermine him and basically just trying to take him out. And in Matthew 23, Jesus speaks directly to the Pharisees.

And it does sound quite harsh. But try to think of it like this. Jesus is like a doctor giving a diagnosis. And he's speaking quite plainly, declaring the truth of their situation to them so they can see it.

Perhaps they might turn around. Now, before getting into the text in sort of detail, we have to know what Jesus means by two particular words that come up a lot in the passage.

[1 : 06] So, what are these words, do we think? Whoa. Whoa. What's the other one? Any guess? Hypocrite. Very good. Whoa and hypocrite.

Seven times in the passage. Whoa and hypocrite. So, what do these words mean? First, whoa. So, whoa is, if it was a chord on a piano, right?

If it was a chord... The three notes would be grief and sorrow and anger all sort of mixed in together. So, it's kind of like, it's, woe is doom and pity and woe condemns, but it laments. Woe says, repent because judgment is coming.

So, what is Jesus angry about? What is he so sorrowful about? Well, the woe is directed at, second word, hypocrisy. It's the hypocrisy of the Pharisees that make Jesus sorrowful.

[2 : 16] So, if you slide your eyes down the passage, you can see it's, woe, you hypocrites. Woe, hypocrites. Woe, hypocrites. Woe, hypocrites. Woe, hypocrites. Okay. So, what does hypocrisy mean? So, it's not, hypocrisy is not just, they say one thing and do another.

Okay. That's not really hypocrisy. That's just like, that's just like all of us, right? That's just inconsistency. It's more than that. Hypocrisy, in this instance, is technically, it's the false appearance of virtue.

Okay. So, that's a technical definition from the original language. It's the false appearance of virtue. And that can happen in two different ways.

So, first, it can be deliberate. You're pretending to be something you're not. You're pretending to be something you're not. And I'll bring to you now the very unusual case of Paul Zimmer.

Has anyone heard of Paul Zimmer? Anybody? Okay. There you go. Thank you. Somebody in touch with popular culture right at the back. So, Paul Zimmer was a TikTok star.

[3 : 26] TikTok? Video sharing platform. So, Paul Zimmer was a TikTok star and he had about 7 million followers. And, I mean, I've watched some of the videos.

Literally, all he would do was just lip sync to songs. And every now and then show you his abs. He's kind of chiseled, kind of. Just a young, he's just like this 20-year-old good-looking guy who lip syncs badly, actually, to songs.

But he had an enormous following with the younger female sort of internet watcher.

But here's where it all was, the downfall. His downfall was he monetized his fame. And so he would say, hey, I'll give you a shout-out in my videos if you send me a few bucks.

Or I'll share your video if you send me a few bucks. And so he was doing that to lots and lots of people. And he wasn't, they were paying him, but he wasn't giving the shout-outs or doing the direct messaging or anything like that.

[4 : 25] So hashtag ban Paul Zimmer started trending and it exploded. And his empire crumbled and he was disgraced. And he stopped posting anything until quite recently.

So two years later, out of the blue, Paul Zimmer posts this picture. And on the picture, it's actually two pictures. On one side is Paul Zimmer. It's kind of not a great photo. It's sort of in the dark and he's a bit unshaven. And on the other side is a picture of a guy called Troy. Troy Becker, 16 years old. And in the post, he says, isn't this crazy? There's this young actor called Troy who looks exactly like me. LOL, ha, ha, ha, ha. A few weeks later, Paul Zimmer says, hey, listen, I've decided to leave social media, but I'm leaving all my social media platforms to Troy Becker because he's such a great guy. Here's the issue. It was immediately obvious to everybody that Paul and Troy are the same person. That he just had a really close shave and changed his hair slightly. [5 : 30] And he's just trying to scam everyone. He's just trying to relaunch his career as a different person, a person who's eight years younger. And it was painfully clear to all of the internet. So Troy would go on and he'd try and say some things and everyone would just be like, Paul, Paul, Paul, we know it's you.

And a couple of months ago, he just deleted all his accounts. So I love this story. This is... So that's a form of hypocrisy, right?

It's pretending to be something you're not, okay? In the case of the Pharisees, so pretending to be virtuous when you're not. But that's actually not what's happening with the Pharisees. There's another way to be hypocritical.

There's another form of hypocrisy. And it's actually more dangerous. It's not pretending to be virtuous when you're not.

It's believing you're virtuous when you're not. You honestly think that you're really, really... You're so great, you can bring your merits to God and go, God, look at my amazing life.

[6 : 33] I've done so well. We're cool, right? We're cool. You're fooling yourself. And this was the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. And we know that because the other most common word in the passage is blindness.

They were blind. They were hypocrites and had no idea. They thought they were winning at this whole religion thing. And Jesus says, no, you're whitewashed tombs.

So Jesus, with his seven woes and seven declarations of hypocrisy, he works like a sandblaster and he's sandblasting away years of paint and dirt and self-reliance and denial.

And he's exposing all the stuff underneath all of that. And he's wanting them to see what he sees. Perhaps they would repent. Introduction.

Let's get into the details of the passage now. As I said, there's seven woes and they come in couplets, okay? So there's three pairs of woes that are connected and then one final sort of climactic woe.

[7 : 31] So let's go through them quite quickly. So we'll start with the first couplet, verses 13 to 15, the first two woes. And we'll start with verse 15. For you travel across the sea and land and make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you shall make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

All right. During the bubonic plague of the 17th century in London, some doctors, they would recommend that the sick leave London for the fresh air of the country.

And, of course, what happened? They spread the plague throughout the nation. This is one of the great dangers of Phariseeism. It's contagious. It's really contagious.

It's like a plague. So these religious leaders, these Pharisees, there's no denying their zeal. You know, they're going everywhere, man. They're trying to convert people.

And traveling is not an easy business back in the days, but they are going everywhere. They are totally up for it. And they would evangelize. And, of course, they would just pass on their overloaded system of hypocrisy and rules onto the next generation.

[8 : 35] That next generation would run with it and actually out-Pharisee the Pharisees. And a fair description of that is verse 13. They shut the kingdom in people's faces by first shutting themselves out and then passing it on.

Okay. The next set of woes. The next pair. The next couplet. Verses 16 to 24. So the first ones. How do I say this? 16 to 24.

It's all the oath-taking stuff. That was quite confusing. So what's that about? Well, it's Jesus giving them an example of hypocrisy because before he's just said, you guys are hypocrites and you're producing hyper-hypocrites without explaining the hypocrisy.

And now he goes, I'm going to give you an example. Let's talk about that whole oath-taking thing that you guys are big on. Verse 16. Woe to you blind guides who say, if anyone swears by the temple, there is nothing.

But if anyone swears by the gold in the temple, he is bound by his oath. Okay. What's going on? So the Pharisees added lots of their own preferences and rules to God's word. So according to them, you could swear an oath on the temple, you know, like on the temple, like I swear by the temple, I will buy you a great falafel on Monday morning, you know, like whatever the swear was, you know, like I swear.

[9 : 55] And, and, but that doesn't really count according to them. But if you swear on the gold in the temple, well, that's a promise you have to keep in their mind.

And Jesus basically says to them, come on people, come on. So the Pharisees had all these rules and they were trying to do all this fancy speculative theological footwork to try and get around being honest.

And, and Jesus critiques them. He says, your, your, your, your thinking is so superficial. And anyway, verse 22, God sees it all. So just, I mean, just be honest, just like, just tell the truth. But the religious leaders, they loved debating things like this, things like this.

They loved kind of debating that. For them, this was really, this was big deal stuff. This was main stuff. Now, how does it connect? Because I said it's a couplet.

How does it connect with the next one? You'll see in a moment here. 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, mercy, faithfulness.

[11 : 06] These you ought to have done without neglecting the others, but blind guides, you strain out a gnat and swallowing a camel. Okay, here's how it relates to the previous one. The Pharisees are hypocrites, Jesus says, because they can't distinguish between the important and the unimportant.

They're not distinguishing between the important and the unimportant. They zoom in on the small stuff and think it's the big stuff. So they have this kind of veneer of religious diligence.

And Jesus says, it's like this. You've got this big goblet of wine and you notice a mosquito has just fallen in and you get a little sieve and you take out the mosquito, but you leave the camel swimming around in there.

So they focus on the minutiae. Because they wanted to show how serious they were about tithing, and of course, bringing their little packets of mint and cumin and all this.

It looks good. They feel really good about it. And you were supposed to give 10% of your vegetables to the temple, but they were just like extreme. They were like, you know, cutting 10% off their little savory weeds that grew around the house.

[12 : 12] And Jesus doesn't have problems with sort of the small stuff, you know. He just says, you're neglecting the things that really matter. Justice, mercy, faithfulness, justice, God's care for the poor.

And mercy, caring for those who are reckless, who should know better. Jesus says, the same care you give to tithing the herbs, you should give to loving people.

And Jesus had experienced their distorted priorities. Remember, the Pharisees looked down on him for hanging out with, you know, sinners instead of having compassion on them. They despised Jesus for healing the man's withered hand on the Sabbath instead of celebrating it.

Matthew 12, they cursed Jesus for casting out a demon of someone instead of rejoicing that this person was free. The religious experts, they focused on the minutiae and overlooked the weighty. It would be like a modern day Christian who gets super uptight and excited about the form of church, but has become ambivalent to the purpose of church. All right.

[13 : 24] How is everyone doing? Everyone okay? Are you okay, Joel? Okay. These are hard words from Jesus. Let's keep going. The third set of woes now, 25 to 28.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites, you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but the inside are full of greed and self-indulgence. 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 uncleanness.

Every couple of weeks, you can ask my wife about this, every couple of weeks we'll find like a kid's sippy cup, like half filled with milk. You guys know this, right? That's been sitting under the couch for

like a month, right by the heating vent.

You know? And it looks fine, like it looks totally fine until you've popped a lid on that bad boy and it's just, it's putrid, right?

It's putrid. The Pharisees, they worked at improving their religious appearance, but ignored their heart.

[14:34] And Jesus gives them this vivid mental picture. So all over the city there are these like tombs, you know, and every year the city would sort of spruce them up for the big feasts, big festivals.

And they'd probably use like a lime render or something, make them really shiny and white. And they would look great, but Jesus says, yeah, they look nice, they look really nice tombs, but there's still tombs, there's still dead people in those tombs.

They still contain death. This is a thing for us to consider for a moment, I think. We need inner transformation, don't we, in our lives?

Constantly. We constantly need inner transformation. If the outward is going to change, we need the inner transformation. That's the order of things. But that inner work, that Holy Spirit work, that requires humility and vulnerability and it means things will get messy.

So it's a temptation to push that off. It's a great temptation to be satisfied with the appearance of goodness. And this is a great spiritual danger for us because, you know, if we put our efforts into just sort of covering our sin and brokenness and hiding our need, we have clearly not understood the gospel and we have not embraced grace.

[16:04] We have to have clarity on this because there is nothing to be gained by putting on ears. There is nothing to be gained from pretending we don't struggle.

So we don't paper over our sin. Jesus says, turn away from that kind of hypocrisy. Walk out of that prison because that is a hellish way to live.

All right. Those are the three couplets. And then there's a final one that sits sort of thematically on its own. Verse 29. I'll just read a couple of verses here.

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 the 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 murder the prophets. Fill up then the measure of your fathers. Okay. What does that mean? The Pharisees are saying, we would never do those terrible things that the previous generations of religious leaders did.

[17:15] We would never do that stuff. It's a bit of an okay boomer moment, I think, right? We'd never do that stuff. And Jesus says, yes, you will. Yes, you will.

You're planning to kill me. There's a lot more to say this, but we actually need to keep going here. So I'm just going to move on to the final couple of verses here. All right.

Verses 37. Doesn't start with a woe. But it's very wistful. Jesus says this to finish off. 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 were not willing. Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem.

I love this. You can hear Jesus saying it. It's just filled with this mix of great affection and great sadness. And then Jesus follows this up by likening himself to a hen and it's quite a striking feminine image, a motherly image, actually, of this hen protecting her chicks with her great wings.

[18:32] It's the safest place in the world to be. I remember years and years and years ago hearing the story of a, in a developing country, a fire swept through this village and just raised it to the ground, just leveled it.

And there's a villager coming through, you know, in great sorrow and there was a carcass of a chicken on the ground, a swollen carcass of a chicken. And in anger, this person just kicked the chicken and out from under the chicken, all these little chicks scurried out, alive, unharmed, untouched.

So when the fire swept through that village, the mother hen wrapped the chicks in its great wings and protected it. This is the picture Jesus gives us right here.

There is only one safe place when the fire comes. When the righteous anger of God against hypocrisy comes, there is one safe place.

There is one safe place. And it's with Jesus. But the Pharisees did not accept these words of Christ.

[19 : 52] Christ. They were not willing to accept the one thing Jesus came to offer them. They were not willing. They preferred to send him to the cross.

So, the final words of Jesus' public ministry, they're quite sad. I'm going to finish up here. Big lessons to consider for us here. Let me give you a couple of questions actually to consider. What kind of disciples are we producing as a church individually in small groups and catechism and all different things that we do.

What kind of disciples are we producing? Are they followers of Jesus who are amazed by grace or are we producing just like nice people?

Another question. Are we so caught up in the minutiae of church land that we miss the heart of God? One more question. Is our great goal to look good for one another?

[20 : 57] Are we just caught up on the optics of our life? Is that good enough for us?

Are we resisting the deep work the Spirit wants to do in us? These are hard questions aren't they? But remember that Jesus tells us these truthful things because he loves us.

He wants to gather us up. And how do we know we're under the wings of Christ? Well we're just we're doing the opposite of what the Pharisees are doing aren't we? Our focus in church land it's the big things.

We are concerned about mercy. We are concerned about faithfulness. We are concerned about justice. and we are praying and we are desiring the deep work of the Holy Spirit in our life.

Let's just spend two minutes thinking about these words of Christ and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to us in these moments. class. Thanks.

[21 : 59] Now we're in what we airline we are Sum it's all and our Pickle Test Verses inux in dovre ■■■■es or Even Myth in tentang all distancing ■■■■