

Matthew 22:41-23:12

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Date: 26 January 2020

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[0 : 00] So, Matthew chapter 22, the last paragraph and the first paragraph of chapter 23, page 828. This is one of those instances where the chapter division is not helpful.

And we are in a very sticky section of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus is on the hot seat. And he is answering the rapid-fire, hostile questions from the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

It's a week before he dies. And they have been pounding him with questions to try and trip him up and make him fall so they can pounce on him once and for all.

And every answer of Jesus is utterly brilliant, which is very encouraging, I think, because not just because he's so brilliant, because we don't have the answers, but he does.

And should you have time and interest, you can go back to the beginning of chapter 21. And Jesus asks twice the number of questions that they ask of him.

[1 : 11] And each time he's reversing what they're saying to him. And the question, obviously, is what is wrong with these guys? You know, these are sincere men who've spent their entire lives studying the Scriptures, but they hate Jesus.

And they refuse him, and they're planning to kill him, and they'll succeed in that. And the answer that Jesus gives us is hypocrisy. I don't want to steal any thunder from next week's passage.

There's plenty of lightning and thunder in ours. But next week, we get to the last speech from Jesus to these people who have made themselves his enemy.

And there's seven times Jesus says to them, woe to you, hypocrite. Just look at the first verse after our passage in 23:13. Woe to you, Jesus says, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

You shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. And for good measure, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

[2 : 26] You travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte. And when he becomes a convert or a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

He's not messing around. But even as he says this, you'll notice Jesus' tone is one of compassion. He's saying, woe to you. He's not gloating. He's not happy.

He tells them as a last measure to bring them to repentance that this is the thing that has got a grip on their hearts. It's hypocrisy because they're about to reach the point of no return.

And I want to tell you as a well-seasoned and well-practiced hypocrite, I have found this passage terrifying, preparing. It's been like being out in a lightning storm and lifting up the biggest umbrella I can.

Or like grating cheese with a tiny nub of cheese on the eye. No, I'm going to get cut. Or like trying to move a tiger from one room to another in a house that doesn't have any doors inside.

[3 : 32] You get the picture. It's a great temptation for Bible teachers to be very nice and pious in front of you all. But not to let God touch or change my heart.

And with the approval that comes in preaching, you begin to live as though appearance is more important than reality. And hypocrisy is so dangerous because it's a form of self-deception.

It's possible to go through the motions of worship without any heart humility. To preach the Bible to others without any intention to obey it yourself.

Or to honour God with my lips and with my heart far from him. And of all sins, hypocrisy has a unique power to push God away.

To hold him at a distance. To hold him at arm's length. By pretending you're good. By pretending you're real. By going through the motions. And I think what's wonderful about this is that Jesus' words here are so hopeful and heartening for all of us who are hypocrites.

[4 : 47] Which means all of us. Sorry to tell you. I once had a visit from an older woman who was a minister's wife.

And as I showed her out of our apartments, there was a woman we met in the hallway who lived in one of the other apartments. Another older woman. And I introduced this woman to this minister's wife and told her she was a minister's wife.

And this woman who was not a believer said, oh, I could never go to church. It's full of hypocrites. And Shirley said, quick as a flash, she smiled and she said, darling, there's a lot of room for one more.

Yeah, I thought that was a great answer. Use it. So, in the end, I think we come away from this. It begins and ends with tremendous encouragement. And Jesus here gives us the one thing that's going to cut through any hypocrisy. And it's the fact that he is Lord. That he's greater than our hypocrisy.

[6 : 01] I want to explain what that means. So, the passage divides in two. The paragraph before, the paragraph at the end of chapter 22. And the paragraph at the beginning of chapter 23. Two points. One, Jesus reveals that he's Lord.

Two, Jesus applies that he's Lord. Is that okay? Just nod. Yeah. You can nod without giving approval. Number one, Jesus reveals that he's Lord.

This is chapter 22, 41 to 46. Now, while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asks them a question. He goes right up to them and asks them a question.

Now, he's on the front foot. He says, what do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he? And they say to him, the son of David. Now, this is the big question.

This is the elephant in the room. Because we've been doing Matthew's gospel for 550 weeks, we can't miss this. And they know it as well. You know, when he came into Jerusalem, cleaned the temple, healed people, they said, where do you get this?

[7 : 04] Like, where do you imagine you get your authority from? And now he takes their lives in his hand, in his own life, in his hands.

And he gives them an answer from their own scriptures, an explanation of who he is. The Christ just means the Messiah.

He's the Old Testament king who God promised to David, a thousand years, King David, a thousand years before Jesus came. The Christ is also called the son of David because God promised a descendant.

Was that a woof I heard? I'd rather hear an amen, but that'll do. All dogs believe Jesus is the Messiah.

This is fantastic.

[8 : 13] Okay. Settle down. Do you know, in preaching conferences, if you want to bring people back in, if you're going through a period where you feel people are wandering away, you tell a dog story.

This is way better. So, son of David. Now, if you've been with us, you know, son of David's a very big deal in Matthew's gospel.

First words in Matthew's gospel, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David. It comes up at moments of key recognition of Jesus.

You remember, just before he gets to Jerusalem, twice he's called son of David. And the crowd, as he comes into Jerusalem, twice calls him son of David.

And my favorite is back in chapter 21, 15, if you want to just look at it. The chief priests and the scribes in the temple saw the wonderful things that he did, healing people. And the children crying out in the temple, Hosanna to the son of David.

[9 : 21] They were indignant. And they said to him, do you hear what they're saying? And Jesus said to them, yes. Have you never read out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies?

God, you have prepared praise. Now, here's the background. David was the greatest Israelite ever. That's why my parents called me David.

He was a man after God's own heart. The sweet psalmist of Israel conquered Philistines. There's nobody who gets higher on the tree than David in the Old Testament king.

And God made a special promise to him that he would have a son, a descendant who would rule after him. And God would establish the throne of that descendant, that Messiah, that king forever. It's absolutely ridiculous to these leaders in Jerusalem that Jesus should even pretend to think that he's the son of David. He had conquered no Philistines. Didn't even have one wife.

[10:23] Hadn't raised an army. Couldn't use a sword. It's deeply offensive that son of David should be in the same sentence of Jesus. But Jesus' question to them shows they've got things completely the wrong way around.

He was indeed the son of David, but way more. They thought they had a high view of the son of David, but their view was woefully inadequate. And here we need to pay close attention to how Jesus asks the question.

Jesus says, whose son is he? And the leaders give the Sunday school simple answer. He's the son of David. But Jesus doesn't finish there.

That doesn't finish the question. It still hangs. It needs a deeper and more wonderful answer that has to do with God coming to be with us. And you know, he's been dropping massive hints in the three parables in the chapter before this.

Jesus referred to himself again and again and again as not just the son of David, the son of God. He is the chief cornerstone. He's the one around whom the wedding feast is thrown. So verse 43.

[11:33] Jesus said to them, okay, how is it then that David in the spirit calls him Lord, saying, the Lord, God, said to my Lord, who's the Messiah, sit in my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.

If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son? He's quoting from Psalm 110 and King David, who wrote it, is obviously speaking about someone who is far superior to him.

He calls this person my Lord. He cannot just be speaking about a human descendant, a Messiah who's going to be his son. It doesn't make any sense to call his descendant my Lord, does it?

And in this Psalm, Jesus is saying, David bows his kingship and does homage to his own descendant, because this descendant is not just going to sit on a throne of gold.

He's going to sit on the highest throne in all the cosmos at the right hand of God, the Father in heaven. God, this is, David prophesies that the coming Messiah will be my Lord.

[12:49] So the Messiah is not just descended from David. He's way much, he's greater than David. He sits on the throne in heaven. I think this is astonishing here in the gospel. Do you know what Jesus is driving at?

He's driving at his incarnation. The only way this Psalm is true is if the Messiah is divine, if he's God in the flesh, if he's Emmanuel, God with us. So he's saying here, I'm not just the son of David.

I'm the son of God. You want to know where my authority comes from? Here I am. I am David's Lord. I am Lord of all. It's absolutely mind-blowing.

And the closest Israel ever got in the Old Testament to drawing near to God, drawing near was at Mount Sinai. And there was, the mountain shook as there was, in the centre there was darkness all around and there were deafening trumpets.

And in the centre of the darkness was fire coming down, going right out through the top of heaven, it says in the Hebrew. And the people gathered with Moses and they said, we are going to die if we keep hearing the voice of God.

[13:58] You go up there instead. But what's so shocking here is that here is Jesus, the man, saying that he is Lord. Jesus, the human.

Jesus, the vulnerable, completely human one. Unbelievable humility of the son of God to take on human flesh, entering Jerusalem on a donkey, walking the path of humility, going to the cross, praying for the forgiveness of those who nailed him to the tree.

This is Lordship and this is what he does with his Lordship. And that's what's really going on here. And a thousand years before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, when this psalm was written, God knew exactly how the son of David would be David's Lord.

Son of David, infinitely superior to any of the greatest Israelites in the Old Testament, came from heaven. Looking at him in the face, God draws very close.

And as David's Lord, he is the Lord and Lord of all. And if only they could see it, they would be saved. It's very encouraging, you know, that he's Lord of very encouraging as they gather to put him to death.

[15:09] It's no surprise to God in heaven that they're about to put him to death. He has enemies. Very encouraging to those who are facing death. The great irony, of course, is that through his death and resurrection, God will put all those who make themselves his enemies under his feet, including those here who want to do away with him.

We are on the cusp of the most terrible suffering for Jesus at their hands. And he is trying to reach them out of their own scriptures. If Jesus is the son of God and Lord, you know, if he's the key to life and if he's the key to everything God is doing, it explains why he can reveal with such clarity and such authority who God is, heaven and hell, what it means to belong to the kingdom and why he is so strangely attractive and desirable to us.

He's Lord. That's what it is. Secondly, then, Jesus applies his lordship. And here we go to chapter 23, verses 1 to 12. And he applies his lordship in two directions to the religious leaders and then to his disciples.

So you see verse 1, he turns to the crowds and his disciples. And now, firstly, then, he applies his lordship to these leaders.

And here is the problem. I mean, you can say yes to everything I've said already and you can even know it to be true but still hold God at arm's length.

[16:38] And the way we do that is by hypocrisy, by saying something outwardly but inwardly refusing him. This is the great sin in Matthew's gospel.

It's the one man's sin that refuses the lordship of Jesus. It's hypocrisy. It's not that hypocrisy diminishes Jesus' lordship in any way. But it is a uniquely effective way of turning our hearts away from Christ, placing ourselves outside the kingdom and pretending to ourselves and to others that we're good.

Now, to be fair, I think these leaders, they're not deliberately insincere. They're not cynical about God.

But in their attempt to try and do what they could do, they developed an approach to life and to faith that focused on the approval of others and not the approval of God.

And when you're focused on the approval of others, it becomes a sort of force field around our hearts, making us impervious to the love and to the knowledge and to the joy of God.

[17:52] They were daily dealing with the scriptures and the things of God. But it was the audience around them who had replaced the fear of God. It's a terrible thing to fall into.

But that's exactly how religious hypocrisy works. And over time, appearance becomes more important than reality. See? Look at verse 3, at the end of verse 3 of 23. They preach.

They preach. They don't practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their fingers. So different from Jesus.

And they've got these strings and ropes, you know, the arcane, semantical, abstract, theological, hermeneutical arguments. And they tie up the Old Testament with all these different major commands and minor commands.

And then they go and heft them onto the people's shoulders with great certainty and authority. And they don't obey the commands themselves. Don't apply to us, they say. They don't lift a finger to obey their own teaching.

[18:52] Now, why? Why does Jesus say this happens? And this is a great clue in verse 5. They do all their deeds to be seen by others.

Love the place of honour at feasts and best seats in the synagogues. Greetings in the marketplace and being called rabbi by others. This is hypocrisy. And in Jesus' day, the word hypocrite simply meant an actor, an actor on the stage.

And a hypocrite, being an actor, takes time. It takes skill. It takes practice to get good at it. Actors take elocution lessons so that they can deliver.

They master accents and inflections and they learn gestures and micro-expressions so that they can perform well and so that they convince the audience that they're not who they say, that they're someone else.

And in Jesus' day, the word could have a positive or a negative meaning. But when Jesus uses it, it's always entirely negative. Of saying one thing in your life of faith and doing another, it's living a lie.

[19:55] We have a very contemporary form of this. It's called virtue signalling. This is a term that has really been popularised since 2015. We signal how morally superior we are to other people by saying we either love something or we hate something.

Example. And this is chosen completely at random. Some people say, oh, I hate those gas-guzzling four-by-fours. What they're really saying is I care so much more about the environment than those

other people do.

This is the way we work. There's a grocery chain in England called Whole Foods. It has huge posters. It says, we are part of a growing consciousness that is bigger than food, one that champions what is good.

Whole Foods. So go to Whole Foods. It's interesting, isn't it, that all the moral outrage that we pour out distracts others from the fact that what we're really trying to do is say we're better than others. And it's no surprise that many professional actors are experts at virtue signalling. Because it's a unique form of sin for us.

[21 : 13] It is like a deliberate sort of spiritual blindness. And this is the way it works. We begin by deceiving other people and we end up deceiving ourselves. And the more applause we get from other people, the more dangerous it is for us.

It enables us to pretend to ourselves that we're better than we really are. And so we hold Jesus at arm's length, pretending things are okay. We hide our sin. We say the right things.

But there's no reality behind it. What are we hypocrites to do? How do we reverse this deadening hypocrisy? It's not trying harder.

I think what Jesus does very wonderfully at the end of this passage is he gives us three concrete practices that if we use them, eviscerate, certainly reverse hypocrisy on a day-by-day basis.

And I want to finish with these three practices. This is applying to the disciples. Number one is the direct experience of the Lord Jesus himself teaching you through the scriptures, through his word.

[22 : 28] Do you know, again and again in the New Testament, after Jesus had gone to heaven, when the apostles are writing to churches of people who'd never heard Jesus, they say things like, faith comes by hearing.

And hearing from Christ preaching. And the translators think, oh, they can't possibly mean that Paul can't possibly mean that Jesus is actually preaching to this congregation in Rome.

He is. He says the same in Ephesians. He says it in a number of places. In other words, as we hear the Bible taught, thank goodness you don't listen to my voice, but you begin to hear the voice of Jesus Christ himself.

If we don't, then the whole exercise becomes a mutual spiritual status of superiority game. Look what Jesus says, verse 8.

You are not to be called rabbi. You have one teacher. Rabbi means great one. And you are all brothers, brothers and sisters, all on a level.

[23 : 39] Call no man a father on earth, for you have one father in heaven. Neither be called instructors. You have one instructor, the Christ. He's not saying we shouldn't have Bible teachers any more than we shouldn't have earthly fathers.

But that whole silly game of titles and spiritual status seeking, which is so much part of the marketplace, is not to be normal amongst us.

Despite the fact that Dan is called venerable. Don't venerable. Don't venerate him. Don't venerate him. We have one instructor.

See what he says there? One instructor. Jesus Christ himself personally. And when we hear the Bible taught, we have direct communion with him. Our hearts burn. It creates faith in us.

And it begins to undermine this hypocrisy. That's the first discipline. Hearing the voice of Jesus Christ directly as the Bible is taught. The second is this.

[24 : 40] Verse 11. It's actively serving each other. This is a concrete thing that we do. We reach out in love to other people. We actually do something.

That means every gathering of Christians is not just a private spiritual exercise for spiritual consumption. It's meant to be a chance to serve. So when you go to a group or when you come to church, when you gather with other Christians, the thought in mind is not what's in it for me, but how can I serve others here?

Yes. I think at the very least that means not floating between different time slots based on when you want breakfast. It means choosing one gathering, choosing one group of people.

But it's not just Sunday. It's all of life. Otherwise, if it's just on Sunday, it's hypocrisy again. Actively serving, hearing the voice of Jesus.

And thirdly and finally, it means genuinely humbling ourselves before Jesus. Verse 12. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled. And whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

[25 : 50] If we exalt him, we can't do one without the other. If we exalt him, we gradually demote the opinion of others. If we humble ourselves, we exalt him. You can't exalt yourself and exalt Christ at the same time.

And I think this means ongoing repentance. It means coming to Jesus on a continual basis for his help. Not trying to cover my sin, but saying, Lord, I've done it again.

I've done it again. I've done it again. Give me grace. Humble me under your mighty hand. Don't try and cover it up. I mean, I don't mind if you cover it up from each other for a while.

But don't cover it up to him. Bring it to him. For he says, and we keep going back to this verse again and again at the end of sermons. And what a relief this is. Jesus says, Amen.