

How can you Escape?

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn once again to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 23, reading once again at verse 32.

Matthew 23 at verse 32. Fill up then the measure of your fathers, you serpents, you brood of vipers. How are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Or how will you escape the judgment of hell? How will you escape the judgment of hell? How will you escape the judgment of hell? In this chapter we have one of the Lord's most direct statements of condemnation against the scribes and Pharisees.

[1 : 12] Most of his ministry was spent trying to reconcile them to the Word of God and to the counsel of God. In fact, the Sermon on the Mount is to all the people, not just to his disciples and followers, but to all people, including the scribes and Pharisees.

He was trying to work reconciliation amongst the leaders of the Jewish nation so that they would be reconciled to God. Instead, as the Lord knew them to be far away and leading the people even further away.

And so, the Lord usually spoke to them compassionately, trying to see them reconciled to the God of their fathers, but not here.

This is the last week of the Lord's life. He has tried and tried again to get them to be reconciled to God, but eventually he's seen that he has failed.

And so, he directs this tirade of judgmental speech against this group of people to show them their situation.

[2 : 25] Having tried every avenue of approach to bring them to the senses, he tries this one last time through giving them an insight as to what awaits them, as to what their judgment is going to be.

But it seems to be all to no effect. But this verse and this chapter is also meant to get us to look at ourselves and see how our relationship is with the Lord Jesus Christ.

How we relate to him. Is he the Christ of the scriptures to us? Is he the Son of God? Is he the only name under heaven given amongst men by whom we must be saved?

Is he the darling of our lives? Is he the one to whom we go to? The one in whom we seek security and salvation? Not only for time, but also for eternity.

One of the most basic questions that faces all of us is, how is a man or a woman made right with God?

[3 : 40] Well, negatively, the unbelieving world has always taught that there's something we can do. Somehow God will weigh us in the balances of goodness or suffering or doctrine and judge us worthy.

Somehow our lives will have some sort of effect on God when he sees how we've lived and that he will pass over our indiscretions and bring us to glory with himself.

The world very often teaches a man is judged right with God by being good. By perhaps being a good neighbor.

Somebody who will go out of his way and give of his time and energy to help those around him. We reckon a good neighbor to be someone who is good at timekeeping, does a good job, is praised by his employer as a good workman, someone who pays his taxes, someone who is generous.

But that's all. Be a good Christian or live a good Christian life according to what the world recognizes as Christian conduct.

[5 : 16] That's the secret. Perhaps that's not the way. Perhaps the way to being found right with God is through sufferings.

The greater the pain, the greater the saint. We can stretch up names like David Livingstone, who spent a large portion of his life going through Africa and taking the gospel to that land when it was

totally ignorant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We can think of Hudson Taylor going to China on his own and someone who was thought foolish and somebody else in a very similar vein, William Chalmers Burns, leaving this country after a great career of preaching the gospel and bringing revivals in different places, and even in Dundee where Robert Murray McChain ministered.

It was William Chalmers Burns who was the instrument use of God to bring ministry to that church where David Robertson now ministers. And so, the greater the suffering, the greater the pain, the greater the saint.

Perhaps as vows of poverty or vows of hardship. As a citizen, whereby we beat ourselves up and whereby we lash ourselves and so cause pain to ourselves, somehow trying to ingratiate ourselves into God's good books.

[7 : 07] That's what the saints of old did and how they dealt with the problem of being or being found favorable with God.

And then there's the church's way of being right with God. Doctrine. A theology that explains every mystery of scripture.

Whether it's faith or repentance or inspiration or the Trinity or the last things or justification.

As long as we hold these doctrines correctly, as according to the scriptures, as long as we can recite large portions of scripture and have them in our minds and in our memories, that's the right way to get right with God.

As long as we hold these doctrines and as long as we know the scriptures, God will see us all right. Now all these things have been tried down through the ages.

[8 : 17] But none are from God and that's the problem. They're all man-made solutions to a spiritual problem.

who does the saving? If it's our goodness, if it's our suffering, if it's our trials, then we ourselves are trying to save ourselves.

And if we're saved by works, we don't need God. We work out a works righteousness. We work out a righteousness which satisfies ourselves and perhaps our peers.

But in God's own words, our righteousnesses are as filthy rags before Him. They are worth nothing. Whether it's our good works or our bad works, they are all as filthy rags.

And we are to flee from them both to Christ. Christ. See, one mistake in any one of these methods and we find ourselves in a difficult situation regarding our standing with God.

[9 : 34] We can never be sure about anything and that's a problem. We can never be sure whether we know enough or whether we suffered enough or whether we're good enough. Was our doctrine right?

was every I dotted and every T crossed? Now, the scribes and Pharisees were self-righteous because they were making themselves to be righteous without God.

They were, as the Lord says here, blind leaders of the blind. They were just those who were keeping the word of God from their people and making them twice as much worthy of hell as the scribes and Pharisees themselves were.

And they were leading the people or God's people away from the truth. Right at the beginning of his ministry, I think it's a Sermon on the Mount, he says, except your righteousness, exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will in no wise inherit or see the kingdom of God. And so, as much as the Lord tried to oppose their doctrine, they continued to lead the people of God astray.

[11 : 07] And that's why his last sermon here to the scribes and Pharisees is not about love and compassion, it's about legalism and the legalistic leadership that they were engaging in with the people of God.

Eight times the Lord calls them hypocrites, five times he calls them blind, he calls them whited sepulchers or whitewashed sepulchers, calls them serpents, vipers, choosing hell over heaven and taking the people of God with them.

What angered the Lord wasn't so much the disciples' confusion, and they were confused. Very often they found the Lord's teaching very difficult to understand, very difficult to apply to their own lives and their own situations, but the Lord wasn't angered because of the disciples' confusion. He bore with them continually, even to the end of his ministry on earth. He wasn't discouraged or angered by the demands of the people.

The people had been led astray by the scribes and Pharisees and they were demanding signs and they were demanding miracles to prove who he was, but not even that angered the Lord.

[12 : 31] What angered him of more than anything else, as we see here in this particular chapter, is the two-faced religion of the scribes and Pharisees.

You know, even Pilate's questions didn't anger the Lord. The Lord asks him, are you asking these questions of yourself?

He tries to take pity on him, he tries to lead him in the right way, but unfortunately Pilate doesn't want to be led. And so the anger of the Lord is not against any of these things, the disciples' confusion or the people's demands or even Pilate's questions.

It's this two-faced religion that the scribes and Pharisees are living and are trying to encourage the people to follow their example. And so he asked them, how are you going to escape the judgment of hell?

If you continue along this way, if your lifestyle as it now is, is going to be that way for the rest of your lives, how are you going to escape the judgment of hell?

[13 : 41] Very often we want to think of the Lord Jesus Christ as being mild mannered and very much someone who would not want to offend the people.

But the Lord Jesus Christ, more than anyone else in the New Testament, speaks about hell, speaks about the judgment of hell, the weeping and the wailing and the gnashing of teeth, that place where the worm turns.

These are all the Lord's directives towards us to examine who we seek to serve, who we worship, who we bow the knee to.

Is it the Lord Jesus Christ or is it to some man-made deity? Remember what the Pharisees were. And we read that portion there in Philippians chapter 3. The boasts that Paul made because he was a Pharisee. He was a Hebrew.

[14 : 49] He was of the tribe of Benjamin. He was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. He even boasted of the fact that he was so zealous he was prepared to destroy the church of God.

All these things were his boasts before the Lord met with him on the road to Damascus. But then on that road, the scales are taken from his eyes.

He's thrown from the horse he's riding. He's made blind for three days, both, well, especially physically, to mirror the spiritual blindness he had.

And then three days later, the physical blindness and the spiritual blindness is removed as he's brought to see the Lord Jesus Christ for who he is.

As Ananias goes to his house and tells him the Lord Jesus Christ has a message for him, that he is to serve the Lord and to go into all far and distant places and to palaces and to kings and there to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ and the message of the salvation that is in Christ alone.

[16 : 00] And it's that one time Pharisee who answers this question. How are you going to escape the judgment of hell?

We can wonder, if Paul was present that day when the Lord Jesus Christ leveled this tirade against the scribes and Pharisees there in the last week of his life.

He was around there. He was a student sitting at the feet of Gamaliel. He tells us that himself.

Perhaps he was there with his scrolls and his lecture notes in his hand as he stood in the cloud looking up at this righteous preacher, denouncing them.

If he was there, he had no answer then. No legalist does. A legalist is someone who looks to the law, who looks to the righteousness by works, and can find no sense of relief, no sense of being at peace with God by trying to work out your own righteousness.

But he does come to an understanding. He does come to the knowledge that no one has anything to say in the presence of God.

[17 : 40] We read it this morning, there is none righteous, no not one. All of us are held, spelled bound before the God with whom we will have to do.

One day, each one of us will have to stand in the presence of God, eyeball to eyeball, and to answer his questions. And to answer the question, what did you do with Christ?

Whose son was he? how did your life relate to the Lord Jesus Christ? And so we'll come to know that by the deeds of the law, no flesh shall be justified in his sight for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Do we dare to think that somehow what we've done or what we've suffered or what we know will suffice for God to save us?

Nor did Paul ultimately. It took him some time. It took him years to discover what he wrote in one sentence.

[18 : 58] A man is made right with God through faith. There is no other name given amongst men by whom we must be saved and we are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves it is the gift of God.

Again in answer to the Philippian jailer Paul's answer to his question is what must I do to be saved? he says believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Many of us can look back to the time when the Lord called us and remember what we were, where we were in our lives, how we were and then wonder why, why did the Lord save us?

Why did he save you or save me and not the many others that we know who are good men and women and yet are strangers to the knowledge of Christ who don't want to know Christ and who want to continue along their journey leading to a lost eternity.

so why did he choose you or me? Was it our intellect? Do you really think that we've ever had one thought that he hasn't had?

[20 : 44] Could it have been our will power or our determination? many of us are no doubt big headed enough to do almost anything.

But do we really believe that God's kingdom would fold up and be defeated without our own contribution? Or could it have been something to do with what we could contribute to God's kingdom?

perhaps God chose us because he could use our money, use what we have, what he has given to us, so that the kingdom wouldn't fail.

Maybe the creator of the ends of the earth has some need that only you or I can fulfill and make his kingdom on earth a success.

but how is the creator with whom there is no variableness neither shadow of turning, the same yesterday, today and forever, how can he have any need whatsoever for us to fulfill in the kingdom that he is establishing here on earth?

[22 : 11] We are big headed enough to think that we can or that there's something we can do. The reality as to why we've been chosen is the same answer given to those who were chosen at the eleventh hour in the parable of the workers in the field.

The eleventh hour workers were chosen to go and work in the field not because there was anything they could contribute to the success of that particular man's venture or his crop or anything like that. He does so only because he sees the need in those men waiting all day, waiting to be hired. How were they going to go home with nothing?

Their need was great and the need was great because they waited all day even till the eleventh hour in case someone would come along and hire them.

Same thing applies to us. He saves us on those same terms. He sees our need. We might not know the need.

[23 : 34] In fact, we don't know the need. But he sees there is a need in us. He sees that we need to have a glimpse of Christ, of the beauty of Christ, of an understanding of the grace and the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

Christ. And having given us that glimpse, he saves us because having seen or glimpsed that gift, we want it.

We want it with all our heart and mind and soul and strength. And he will give us what he thinks is right.

What does he think is right? his light, the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. His love, the love that so loved us that he died for us.

The joy, the joy that fills the heart of everyone who is brought to Christ and the peace that follows as we come to understand the peace that now exists between God and man.

[24 : 52] Everyone in the whole world wants to be at peace with God, especially before they die. But nobody wants to bow the knee before God unless God has entered that life.

But he will give us light and love, joy and peace, and a life that will never end. everlasting life.

New day after new day after new day in his company, with his love, with his people, in his glory.

And we have to ask this question, Jesus, whose son is he?

he? As we sit here this evening, we have to answer that question, whose son is he? The scribes and the Pharisees knew, in the same way many of us who have been brought to this church and attended on the services, know whose son in Jesus Christ is.

The scribes and the Pharisees knew, and yet they refused to bow the knee. It's a question we have to ask ourselves.

[26 : 13] Are we prepared to bow our knee before him? There will come a time when every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, that Jesus Christ is Jehovah, to the glory of God the Father.

But may it be that tonight's the night, that today is the day, that now is the accepted time for you, and even this evening is the evening of your salvation.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us then conclude our worship, singing to God's praise in Psalm 51. Psalm 51, you'll find on page 280.

After thy loving kindness, Lord, have mercy upon me. For thy compassion, great, blot out all mine iniquity. Me cleanse from sin, and thoroughly wash from mine iniquity.

For my transgressions, I confess my sin I ever see. We'll sing down to the end of the verse, Mark 7, that's six stanzas, the gospel. tomb ■ic won.

[27 : 47] Be kind, Lord, of mercy upon me.

For thy compassion's great water on my iniquity.

Be cleansed from sin and through remorse from my iniquity.

For my trespassions I confess my sin I ever see.

It's me the only hour I sinned in my sight of this hill.

[29 : 07] And when thou speak, thou mayst be just and hear him judging still.

People died in iniquity was born, I love you.

I love the Lord, so be consigned in goodness and sin.

Behold, thou mayst be in your heart, with truth delighted art, and wisdom thou shalt bring me low within the written heart.

Do thou with his soft spring me, I shall be cleansed so.

[30 : 51] give wash of me, and then I shall be white and turn on my soul.

And now may grace, mercy and peace, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, rest on you, and abide in you, now and always.

Amen.