

# Jesus the Teacher - The Pharisees and their Woes!

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[ 0 : 00 ] Matthew 22, we're taking up the reading in verse 41. Can I just see the next slide? Yeah, that's about seeable, isn't it? That's good. So you can try and follow along on the screen, or if you have a Bible, I'm reading from the NIV.

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he? The son of David, they replied.

He said to them, No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,

For whoever among you will be your servant. Sorry, mix that up. Verse 12. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

[ 2 : 12 ] Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. Woe to you, blind guides! You say, if anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing. But if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.

You blind fools! Which is greater, the gold or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, if anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing.

But if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath. You blind men! Which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

[ 3 : 17 ] Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.

Woe to you teaches the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill, and cumin, but you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a nut, but swallow a camel. Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!

You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs which look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.

[ 4 : 32 ] In the same way on the outside you appear to people as righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!

You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, and you say, if we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of prophets.

So you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

Fill up then the measure of the sin of your forefathers. You snakes!

You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers, some of them you will kill and crucify, others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.

And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

[ 5 : 39 ] I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Luke, 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.

Amen, and the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word. C.S. Lewis, acknowledged and recognized, as many have throughout history, that sometimes truth must hurt.

If I had suggested to you that those were the words of Jesus, but you'd never read the words of Jesus before, but only heard of his character, you might have been somewhat surprised that it was the Lord Jesus himself who uttered such harsh words of condemnation.

Perhaps Jesus is not the person we always imagine him to be. He is not always gentle Jesus, meek and mild. And sometimes it is inappropriate to be gentle Jesus, meek and mild, isn't it?

[ 7 : 00 ] I mean, you couldn't be gentle Martin Luther King Jr., meek and mild, in the face of that racism that he encountered in the southern states of the United States of America back in the 50s and 60s.

A meek and mild voice wouldn't change society for the better, wouldn't call out the evils of racism. When Martin Luther King preached his message to the people of America, he wasn't condemning every white person for the way in which the blacks were treated in America.

He was condemning the institution that allowed for that to happen. And in the same way Jesus does this, he calls out not individual Pharisees and scribes, but the whole system that prevented men from finding God, that put barriers in the way to receiving the grace and mercy of Almighty God.

It's not individual Pharisees and scribes. There were individual Pharisees and scribes who were sympathetic toward the Lord Jesus Christ, and some of whom became his followers, like Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, whose grave was used for the burial of Jesus.

These also were religious leaders, but they were not part of that institution that condemned Jesus unjustly and illegally to his death. It was that institution that he condemns because of the way in which they misrepresented God to the people.

[ 8 : 40 ] And it reminds us that religion can do us good or can do us harm. Religion can provide a way to God or a barrier to finding God, and it has always been the case.

So C.S. Lewis said, If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end. If you look for comfort, you will not get either comfort or truth, only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin and in the end despair.

Soft soap. And Jesus was not into giving people soft soap, telling them what they wanted to hear, telling them what, as Paul puts it, what their itching ears desire to hear.

He declares to us the word of God, and he does it very much on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. If people will not receive it, then they are not willing to receive it.

How often would I have gathered you, he says, as a hen gathers its chicks under its wings, but you were not willing. None of us will be able to turn around to God and say, well, you know, in the end I am unsaved.

[ 9 : 53 ] In the end I will not enter into heaven because you would not have me. That is never the case. It will always be because you were not willing.

And so Jesus makes an appeal, as he often does. And in doing so, he makes an appeal, seeking again to ask them to consider his identity.

For Matthew, the identity of Jesus is absolutely crucial to understanding Jesus. He is, as Matthew begins his gospel, Emmanuel God with us.

And this, of course, is the great challenge to the Jews who believed, as we were reminded last week, in the principle of the Shema, that God is one God and we must worship God in spirit and in truth.

We must worship God and serve him only. All of those great messages have come through. And Jesus is continually asking the question, who am I? Who do men say that I am?

[ 10 : 58 ] In Matthew 16. If I can declare sins forgiven and can demonstrate it in the healing of the paralyzed man, then who am I?

If the winds and waves obey me, and only the winds and waves can only obey their creator, then who am I? If I am David's son and David calls me Lord, then who am I?

And that becomes the great question that Jesus is asking at the end of 22. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, what do you think about the Christ?

Whose son is he? Now we know, don't we, that the Pharisees have been asking that question continuously. Who are you? Where are you from? We know where you're from.

We know you're Mary's son. That was a slight on his legitimacy. We know you're from Nazareth and nothing good comes from Nazareth. Okay, so they knew his human origin, but they knew nothing of his divine origin.

[11:57] And there are people, as we know, who are willing to entertain the prospect that Jesus of Nazareth really was the Messiah. They had a few days before welcomed him in Jerusalem and they had cried Hosanna.

And they recognized and identified that this could be the coming king as they laid their palm branches before him. The Pharisees, the scribes, of course, they wouldn't accept this. And they had spent their time, as we've seen, questioning, questioning, questioning, trying to trip him up.

They weren't honest questions. They were never honest questions. They were questions that were designed to undermine Jesus with the crowds, to get him to say something that would allow them to condemn him either before the crowds or before the Romans and would bring about his death.

And so Jesus turns the tables and he asks them a question. Okay, whose son is the Christ? This long-for Messiah, whose son is he?

And they knew the answer to that was the son of David. And he quotes from them Psalm 110 verse 1. The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.

[13:10] So Jesus says, if then David calls him Lord, how can he be his son? And then the answer is, from them, nothing.

So he managed to stump them. Checkmate. There was nothing else to say. And they dared say anything else. No one dared to ask him any more questions.

And Jesus at this point turns away from trying to persuade the Pharisees and the scribes. And chapter 23 verse 1 says, he speaks to the crowd and to his disciples.

He goes above the heads of the religious leaders and he makes his appeal to the crowds who are under their influence and have been held back by their rules and regulations that they sought to bind them with.

and at the same time shut them out of the kingdom of God. So this is a decisive moment. No longer would he try to persuade the religious establishment.

[14:16] They are his determined enemies. They are going to seek to destroy him. He will, in the last few days of his life, appeal to the crowds. You see, the crowds welcomed Jesus.

They thought he was on the way to become a king. He was going to take up a throne. But the only throne he would take would be the cross. And the only crown he would take at this point would be the crown of thorns.

That was determined. That was part of the will and the plan of God. But, he's going to make his last appeal before that takes place to these crowds.

Before he does that, he pronounces seven wars upon the Pharisees. Seven wars. And they're brutal.

There's no way around that. They are absolutely brutal. This is what Jesus thinks of false teachers. This is what Jesus thinks of those who would shut people out of the kingdom of God.

[15:28] But at the same time, he is drawing a contrast between the faith that he is bringing and the faith that his disciples should manifest as opposed to the faith and the religion and the rules and rituals that were manifest by those scribes and Pharisees.

this is something for the crowd to discover. And so, Jesus says in chapter 23, verse 2, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

Now, the word for seat gives us the English word cathedral. To speak out of a seat is to speak ex cathedra. If you know something of your church history, you'll know that it's claimed that the Pope in Rome, when he speaks ex cathedra, will speak without error.

That's not something I believe is right, but it's nonetheless something they teach. When you speak from a seat, you speak with authority. You speak legitimately.

And you may well declare truth. And Jesus says the Pharisees, the scribes, when they speak from the word of God, they declare truth. So you should listen to them.

[16:51] But you shouldn't do what they do because they do not practice what they preach. Have you heard of that expression before? Go practice what you preach.

And that's important for us to realize. You know, people will speak truth. And the truth should be heard. You can have somebody who is an out and out hypocrite and everybody knows them to be a hypocrite.

But when they read to you or speak to you from the word of God, they're speaking truth. You can't say, I'm just going to ignore that truth because it's come from that person's mouth. The truth still is the truth. It doesn't change.

Just because a liar speaks it still remains true. And so Jesus says, yes, listen to them. but observe their lives.

And if they are not living according to that truth, then do not do what they do for they do not practice what they preach. What do they do instead? They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

[18:03] Okay, so it's hard enough to follow God. It's even harder when people put unnecessary rules and regulations upon you and tell you that you need to abide by things that God himself does not say you need to abide by.

And it's even worse when they see you under the weight of those burdens and struggling to survive under the weight of those burdens and then they just do nothing to help you.

Dismiss you as sinners. Ignore the weight and the burden that you carry. Part of ministry is to be concerned pastorally to support people as they struggle.

it's not just the job by the way of the minister though of course it's the minister's job but the job of each one of us to support people when they're in need spiritually.

Paul says in Galatians chapter 6 in verse 1 if you see anyone in a sin if you see anyone weighed down in a sin you who are spiritual should support him.

[19:12] You who are spiritual should stand with him. The image is if he's falling you should get down on the floor get under him pick him up and help carry his weight bear his burden.

What you shouldn't do is say well stupid fool got himself in a mess he'll have to sort himself out.

Yeah we're all stupid fools sometimes aren't we? We all mess up and get it wrong sometimes.

We all need the gentle patient pastoral care of one another when we're in trouble. It is not our place to judge it is our place to support and to help.

And the Pharisees well they wouldn't do any of that. They wouldn't seek to support anybody. They dismissed the crowds as sinners. If the crowds dared question them well what have you got?

How can you lecture me you sinner? Remember they said that to the blind man that Jesus healed. He said well I don't know what's happened to me but you know I was blind now I see that's what I know.

[20:20] Say how dare you lecture us you sinner. You know we're learned we have our theological degrees we have our titles rabbi master people give us the best seats in the room you know who are you to question us?

and they flaunt their learning as if somehow that excuses their callousness and their lack of compassion.

So Jesus says about these Pharisees he says verse 5 everything they do is done for men to see they make their phylacteries wide and the tassels of their prayer shawl long a phylactery is a box that they wore on their forehead or on their arm and it had within it a part of the scripture usually the Shema here or Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one you should love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul with all your mind etc.

So they have that it's literally on their foreheads before their eyes on their arms on the doors of their houses and they were proud of their knowledge of the scripture and these tassels these tassels existed for a variety of reasons the longer the tassels they had perhaps the more spiritual they were perhaps they existed so that as you went past if you were in need you could reach out and touch the tassel and you would be signifying to the religious leader that you needed perhaps their prayer or their intervention or their support but they wore them as a garment to show off look at me in my finery I don't exist to help you I exist to stand above you to remind you of just how important I am well they love that recognition says Jesus and they love the fact that the people call them rabbi and

they greet them in the marketplace as somebody important oh look I've just seen the rabbi and they overheard that and they like that and even better to be called master oh he's so learned you know so important and then Jesus says what should your attitude be to such people don't call them rabbis or masters or fathers because remember ultimately you only have one now don't misunderstand he's not saying you know to children don't call your father father so Eve don't get it in your head that you can call me

I don't know something like brother or bro or anything like that yeah I'm still your father but I'm your earthly father I don't have ultimate authority over my children if I try to persuade them to do something contrary to the word of God they don't have to obey me if God forbid I was abusive in any way they should refuse to obey me because I don't have ultimate authority over them you can call me pastor or teacher but I do not have ultimate authority over you you can respect what I might know and be willing to listen to what I have to say but I am not infallible I can get things wrong and I am not the authoritative teacher of anyone that's the Holy Spirit's job we have one teacher and I can help you and pray for you and support you but I am not your Lord

[ 23 : 57 ] I am not Christ I cannot save anyone and you should be really really glad that your salvation does not depend upon me a weak sinner who like you needs the grace of God I did not claim I do not claim to be a vicar for Christ or stand in the gap and provide a way for you like the Pharisees did they did not allow for salvation that came apart from their guidance their instruction their learning and their will they became the barrier that prevented people from being saved little wonder Jesus said war to them war to them there is no other name given under heaven by which we should be saved save the name of Jesus so Jesus denounces the system because the system stands in the way of salvation it effectively provides another way to the only way which is Jesus yeah make sense okay so now you understand the harshness of what takes place seven wars quickly go through them just as they are okay very quickly because you couldn't go through seven wars in a short time war to you number one war to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites this is verse 13 for you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces for you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in now Jesus is the way to the kingdom of heaven he has made that clear again and again and again and again the Pharisees have made it clear again and again and again that they're not prepared to go in that way follow that way and therefore they're not only not prepared to enter into themselves they are telling everybody else not to enter into it as well and so he says war to you the second the first war then the war rather as I've said is to bar the way to God the second war is in verse 14 war to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte and when he becomes a proselyte you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves

I should have said the word hypocrite you've heard it before literally means to wear a mask to hide your true identity the hypocritus in Greece in Greek is the actor who hides his true identity by becoming a different persona on the stage so you don't know who they are their true identity is behind a mask so the Pharisees he says they're hypocrites they hide their true selves behind the mask the veneer of religiosity the proselyte is somebody they seek to make a follower of them and they would travel Jesus says land and sea to make followers to make them just like they are to make sure that they are absolutely obedient to their rule and to ensure that they give and support their interests and because these people are not entering into the kingdom of God they're still subjects of hell so anybody who follows them becomes as much a son of hell as they are false religion is dangerous it leads to a bad end that's because truth is not a matter of indifference it's not a case of you have your truth and I'll have mine it might be that some truth that you think you have is just a lie that you don't understand and it can be extremely dangerous remember what C.S. Lewis said about soft soap it might look like it may make you clean but it's not very good stuff it doesn't get through to the deep parts that need cleaning out war number three is verses 60 to 22 war 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 or the temple that has made the gold sacred and you say if anyone swears by the altar it is nothing 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 by everything on it and whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it and whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it and you think what was all that about okay this is classic hair splitting yeah

I'm gonna bring God a gift I'm gonna put it I'm gonna offer it to God and I'm gonna put it on the altar and if I have to if I give this gift but I don't make an oath then I'm not bound by the oath so I can take the gift back but if I make an oath and I am bound by the oath and so I've got to leave it there yeah it's kind of this attempt to negotiate with God how kind of serious sin really Lord I know you say this sin is bad but surely it's not as bad as this one it's only a lie little white lie it's not as bad as a black lie or a gray lie something in the middle or this sin it's not as bad as that sin so alright I may have been covetous I may have been greedy but it's not as bad as murdering somebody so surely you're not so concerned about that and so we do these kinds of things we try to kind of reduce our obligation to

God by saying well I didn't really mean this by it or I didn't mean that by it or yes God I've made a promise but I'm going to take that promise back and you'll not hold me to it and in Ecclesiastes the writer talks about making an oath to God and he says be very careful about that this idea that I can make a promise to God and say well I didn't really mean it so I'm going to take it back and then God is going to let me off with that the writer says no no that doesn't happen you're better not making any kind of promise at all than making a promise that to keep it Jesus therefore says his advice is don't make any kind of promises at all just let your yes be yes and your no be no I swear by almighty God that if he gives me this I will do that have you ever said that God if you do this for me then

[ 31 : 19 ] I promise I will become a missionary in Timbuktu for the next 40 years well maybe it didn't happen but the promise was made Jesus says they're fond of making all but really they're just trying to negotiate with God they're splitting hairs they're trying to tell God what he should take seriously and what he should not and by doing that they bind men to all kinds of silly rules and regulations that just frankly confuse us and that's what they were doing here war for war to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the way to matters of the law justice and mercy and faithfulness these you ought to have done without neglecting the others you blind guides straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel now verse 4 through to verse 6 contain three wars and all of them effectively say the same outward religious acts while neglecting the need for inner transformation that leads to justice mercy and faithfulness so in first case it's about tithing tithing was a requirement of old testament law you give 10% of all that you have including your food stuff and your herbs and so they give the 10% of their herbs as well they were very scrupulous about it oh yes they were very faithful in 25-26 says what you scribes and pharisees hypocrites for you clean the outside of the cup and the plate but inside you are full of greed and self indulgence you blind pharisee first clean the inside of the cup and the plate then the outside also may be clean okay so they were very scrupulous about cleanliness they followed ritual rules about how to wash their hands making sure they washed them themselves apart from those who were regarded as sinners so they were ceremonially unclean they weren't concerned about what they were like on the inside as long as everybody in the outside thought they're very special and holy people these pharisees and then the next war in verses 27 and 28 war to you scribes and pharisees hypocrites for you are like whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful but within are really full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness so you also appear outwardly righteous to others but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness see the message is exactly the same don't pretend to be good on the outside if you're not good on the inside and religion allows you that opportunity to play that game come in do the right things bow in the right places bow your head in the right places look all holy perhaps look up and smile a lot so that it looks like some kind of aura is around you go to the priest and confess your sins on

Friday make sure you eat fish and then off to the work at man's club on Friday night because you confessed your sins so you can do and beat up the wife but you can always go back next Friday and do it again and I say that because I knew a man like that the most religious man in the street he was but he was using religion as a get out of jail free card it was all a pretense you see for a faith that does not change your heart is not a true faith!

a faith that does not lead to righteousness justice and faithfulness is not genuine faith a faith that does not make you a good nicer godlier person that helps your neighbor loves your neighbor and is merciful to those who are down and out is not the faith of Jesus and so Jesus says beware of outward show that does not reflect itself in a changed life and then the last war verses 29 to 36 war 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 the shedding of the blood of the prophets thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered!

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 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 it's very hard to read that when religion does you no good is when it leads you to murder innocent people when it leads you to get so angry when people are trying to tell you the truth that you would destroy them rather than hear the truth you look around the world you see it happening people who claim to follow the will of

God and obey the voice of God who will destroy people in buildings blow planes murder innocent people in shopping malls all in the name of God it's ever been thus how will they escape the fire of hell and Jesus ends this awful passage and it is awful by saying oh Jerusalem Jerusalem how often would I have gathered you this lament I'm not fond of pictures of Jesus I tend to avoid them because every picture of Jesus becomes a kind of caricature this is a painting it's a little bit different it shows something of the remorse on the face something of the heartache of what it must have been like as he looked at Jerusalem that privileged city the

[ 38 : 21 ] Messiah had come they had welcomed him as king in two days time they will say away with him crucify we will not have this man rule over us and become twice as much sons of hell as the Pharisees 80 70 the city would be destroyed the temple destroyed they would have filled up the cup and all that God promised came upon them thank God in the future there is still hope for Israel but in the rejection of the Messiah they were rejecting their only hope of salvation my friends today I have told you about scribes and Pharisees who used religion but it did not save them I may be speaking to people today in this room who are using religion that does not save the message

Jesus would give to you is you must come to me I will gather you if you will come to me I will protect you like a hen protects its chicks if you will come to me I will save you if you will come to me are you willing are you willing let us pray