

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

OCT 31ST-NOV 1ST, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

## 1ST & 2ND WOES: LEADING PEOPLE ASTRAY (MATT. 23:13-15)

**Woe #1-** Locking up the Kingdom & not even entering in themselves (vs. 13).

- It's bad enough to keep yourself out of God's Kingdom because of pride and unrepentant hearts, but it's worse when you stand in the way of others getting in.
- By teaching man-made traditions instead of God's truth, this group had "shut the door". How can we hinder people's salvation?
- We can preach a gospel with a water-downed message that has no power to save anyone.
- We can also live in such a way where our lifestyles, attitudes, words, and our behavior make the Christian message repulsive to an unbelieving world.
- Our lives are intended to point others to the character of God!

**Woe #2-** Doggedly pursuing converts, not to Judaism but to Pharisaism, and pouring the same poison of condemnation and guilt into their new followers (vs. 15).

- The Pharisees were devoted to winning others to their legalistic system, but not so they could introduce people to the living God.
- They were more in love with making others Pharisees than a worshippers of Yahweh, & their converts were "twice as much a child of hell" as them!

Converts to Pharisaism would surpass their teachers in hypocrisy and evil.

- And as result, even though that convert had been convinced they were following God, they incurred an even harsher judgment from God.
- "The gospel we preach and believe dictates the kind of disciples we are and the kind of disciples we make."- Bill Hull

Hypocrisy has a lasting and dramatic impact not just on our spiritual lives- but on the spiritual lives of those around us.

- Our distortions of the gospel- both in our words and lifestyles- can "shut the kingdom of heaven" in people's faces!
- Our testimony is built more around how we behave versus what we claim to believe.

## 3RD & 4TH WOES: PERVERTING GOD'S LAW (MATT. 23:16-24)

**Woe #3-** For formulating ridiculous oaths (vs. 16-22).

- They were "blind guides"- misleading people into man-made perversions.
- One practice Jesus refers to is taking oaths by the temple, gold of the temple, altar, etc.
- Scholars are divided as to exactly how this deception was taking place.

But it seems like it was a clever parsing of words and methodology where oaths were made using semi-sacred things ("gold of the temple", "gift on the altar") that weren't technically legally binding, instead of actually swearing by the temple or altar itself.

- These technicalities had been concocted to allow people to sin and deceive others.

**Woe #4-** For their suffocating observance of the small matters of the law while neglecting the very heart of God and Torah observance (vs. 23-24).

- These folks tithed (gave ten percent) of everything, right down to the herbs in their pantry.
- They were zealous, legalistic and sticklers for details in the most minor laws and commands, but they had absolutely neglected what was most important.

"Justice, mercy, and faithfulness"

- The rule following was a smoke screen to cover up the fact that they weren't doing what was right and treating others in an equitable manner, they weren't showing mercy to those in need, and they didn't have whole-hearted integrity.
- "Straining a gnat, ...swallowing a camel"- Jesus used a hyperbolic idiom to illustrate the absurdity of their majoring on minors.

Hypocrisy can be incredibly self-deceptive and lead us to twist scripture and focus on all the wrong things- which is really just a rationalization of sin under the guise of legalism and even being "religious".

- Whenever we twist God's Word for our own purposes, we're guilty of perverting His law.
- It isn't wrong to want to follow God's Word completely or have personal convictions about "minor" details- but we must make sure we're majoring on the majors.

## 5TH & 6TH WOES: HIDING EVIL WITH HYPOCRISY (MATT. 23:25-28)

**Woe #5-** For a fundamental misunderstanding of what is "clean" and "unclean" (vs. 25-26).

- Pharisees were known for their impeccable outward observances of Torah and for looking the part ("phylacteries broad, ...fringes long", vs. 5).
- But man sees only the outward appearance- God looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).
- Purity always begins in the heart.

It's possible to clean a dish on the outside, and not really deal with the mess on the inside.

- In the same way, these people had "cleaned the outside" of their lives, but their hearts were filled with greed and self-indulgence.
- They were using religion for financial, cultural, and social gain, and then hiding their true motives behind a polished exterior.

**Woe #6-**For falsely whitewashing their lives, like a newly occupied tomb, but concealing inside themselves spiritual rottenness and decay (vs. 27-28).

- Nothing in the Jewish world was more unclean than a decaying body (Num. 19:11).
- The custom was to wash a body and leave it in the tomb to decay for a year.

Jesus' image is from the first stage- of a body rotting, stinking, and decaying in a tomb.

- But the outside of a tomb can appear beautiful! Jesus says, "you also appear outwardly righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (vs. 28).
- Religion can be a very dangerous cover-up for spiritual deadness. We must ask, "Is there life inside of me?"

Hypocrisy focuses primarily on the external show of righteousness for others to notice and applaud, but ignores the internal corruption of sin.

- Are your efforts at moral renewal focused on simply, "being a good person"? Or have you experienced God's power to change your heart?
- Is Christianity a matter of duty or delight? Is holiness being cultivated in your heart?

## 7TH WOE: MURDERING GOD'S PROPHETS (MATTHEW 23:29-36)

**Woe #7-** For pretending to honor the prophets by decorating their tombs when, in fact, their forefathers murdered the prophets (vs. 29-36).

- It was a tradition for the Pharisees to build, improve, and embellish the tombs of the prophets who had been martyred (vs. 29).
- But it was their "fathers" (the hypocrites of ages past) who had killed these martyrs (vs. 31).

"Fill up...the measure of your fathers!" (vs. 32)

- He's saying, "keep on sinning by persecuting God's messengers, and so prove yourselves to be just as evil as your fathers".
- In essence, Jesus is daring them to kill Him.
- In a matter of days, these same people would cry out for the crucifixion of the Messiah, leading them to shout, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (27:25).

It's not just Jesus whom they would kill- Jesus said He would send "prophets, wise men, and scribes" whom they would also kill, crucify, flog, and persecute from town to town (vs. 34).

- They would be held guilty by God for all of the righteous blood that had been shed on earth- from the first righteous martyr (Abel) to the most recent in Jewish history (Zechariah). God's judgment was coming (vs. 36).

Hypocrisy lashes out defensively at the truth and any messenger who speaks the truth.

- Religious hypocrisy reserves a special hatred for anyone who brings a message of authenticity, internal holiness, grace, and truth.
- Often that hatred is hidden under the guise of "standing for tradition and/or truth", but deep down it's hatred that's stoked by conviction.

## "O JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM" (MATTHEW 23:37-39)

The "these things" that would come upon "this generation" in vs. 36 is a prophetic reference to God's judgment on Jerusalem.

- In A.D. 70, the Romans surrounded the city of Jerusalem and completely destroyed it.
- The Jewish historian Josephus was an eyewitness to this tragedy, and spoke of human corpses, cannibalism, and unimaginable suffering.

This would be God's judgment on the nation of Israel for their rebellion.

- And Jesus, now speaking as God, talks of how He wanted throughout the history of Israel to "gather your children together" under the shelter of His wings- but they just weren't willing (vs. 37).
- Because of their unwillingness & rejection- their house will be desolate (vs. 38).

Vs. 39 marks the official close of Jesus' public ministry- from this point on, all of His instructions will be made in private.

- Jerusalem's chance to accept Messiah while He was physically present had ended.
- The next time they would see Him would be when He returned as the conquering King to Jerusalem (vs. 39)- this is a reference to the 2nd coming.

**Hypocrisy. Where does it end? (Matt. 7:21-23)**

**Take off the Mask. How do we Fear the Lord?**