

Matthew 23:13-22: But woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! 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. ¹⁴ Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation. ¹⁵ Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea & land to make a single proselyte, & when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. ¹⁶ Woe 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." ¹⁷ You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? ¹⁸ 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." ¹⁹ You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰ So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹ And whoever swears by the temple swears by it & by him who dwells in it. ²² And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God & by him who sits upon it.

Intro: Last Sunday, we saw Jesus begin to call out the false religious teachers of His day & show the sin, hypocrisy, pride, & wickedness of the scribes & Pharisees. In view of God's mercy, humble yourselves, flee hypocrisy, follow Jesus, and you will have great reward! Today, Jesus begins to pronounce eight "woes" on these false teachers – He pronounces curses upon them for their sin & hypocrisy. All the "woes" we will begin to see today are in contrast to the many "blessed's" in chapter 5 in the Sermon on the Mount. But this is love too!

Ligon Duncan: His denunciation is purely pastoral. He is not just venting, He is not just finally fed up, & He is going to let them have it. Jesus is calculated & deliberate & ultimately loving in what He says in this passage. Eight times He pronounces woes on the scribes & Pharisees. Seven times He calls them hypocrites. Four times He calls them blind. Once He calls them fools. He calls them the offspring of vipers once. His words are strong. But He is not engaging in name-calling. This is calculated, spiritual confrontation. What in the world was Jesus doing? Two things at least. First of all, Jesus was showing God's people God's attitude towards hypocrisy . . . secondly, the Lord Jesus Christ is offering another general warning to these scribes & Pharisees . . . the Lord Jesus Christ in His graciousness is once again warning these men to flee from their own sins & to flee to Him & to the Gospel. And so in denouncing them, He is actually telling them the things that they need to know in order to be saved. Just as the prophets confronted wicked kings in the days of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ is confronting wicked religious leaders, & He is doing it, not b/c He hates them, but b/c He desires them to turn from their sins & be saved.

These false teachers desired the glory of men not the glory of God. Whose glory do you most desire? Whose praise do you most desire? Whose acceptance do you most desire? Whose smile do you most want to be shining down on you? By the grace of God, flee false teachers & false religion & pursue Christ, the heart of true religion.

1. False Teachers Lead People To Hell

Matthew 23:13: But woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! 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.

a. What does "woe" mean?: "How horrible will it be!" "What a horror!" "What a tragedy!" "What a disaster!"

- **D. A. Carson:** A "woe" can be a compassionate "alas!" (24:19), a strong condemnation (11:21), or a combination of the two (18:17; 26:24). In Matthew 23, condemnation predominates, but it is neither vindictive nor spiteful so much as judicial. Jesus the Messiah pronounces judgment.

- **Daniel Doriani:** Like a piano chord played by one hand, a woe has three notes: grief, anger, & sorrow. When something evil happens, the woe both condemns & laments that evil. The woes call for judgment, yet they say there is time to repent. The judgment is almost, but not quite, here. Jesus' woes call for judgment & repentance, even at the last moment. The woes are the last attempt to rouse sleepers to flee as a forest fire races toward a wooden house. It mingles doom & pity with one last call to repent.

b. Who were the scribes & Pharisees?: Scribes were the very educated experts in the law of God & teachers of

God's law. They were held in high esteem – highly regarded by the people of Jesus' day. The Pharisees (separated ones) had pledged themselves to the higher Jewish life, so to speak. They sought to live with utmost purity & commitment to the law of God, more so than common Jewish people. Scribes & Pharisees: religious leaders.

c. What is a hypocrite?: An actor; a fake (wears a mask). Says one thing, but does another, with evil, self-righteous intent. **Matt 23:3, 5:** For they preach, but do not practice; ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others

d. The scribes & Pharisees shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces: Jesus is saying they actually keep people out of heaven who want to go! They shut the door of heaven in people's faces by their teaching & their lives

- **1 Timothy 4:16:** Keep a close watch on yourself & on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself & your hearers.

- **James 3:1:** Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

e. The scribes & Pharisees aren't going to heaven, & they lead others to hell as well: V. 13: For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. (They don't trust Jesus or help others trust Jesus!)

Matthew 7:15, 21-23: Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves . . . ²¹ Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, & cast out demons in your name, & do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

How do you enter in? Jesus! **GOSPEL! John 10:9:** I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved!

f. Who are the false teachers of our day? JW's; Mormons; Cult Groups; Romanists; Promoters of LGBTQIA+; Prosperity Preachers: Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, T. D. Jakes, Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Kenneth Copeland, Myles Munroe, etc. (Love of money; Deny the Trinity; Minimize sin & the cross; Deify man & belittle God)

2. False Teachers Steal Money From The Weak & Vulnerable & Pray For The Praise Of Men

Matthew 23:14: Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation. (textual variant; Matt 6:13)

Mark 12:40; Luke 20:46-47: Beware of the scribes . . . ⁴⁷ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.

a. They devour widow's houses: They steal money from the most weak & needy in society!

Robert Stein: (1) Accepting payment from widows for legal aid and advice, even though this was forbidden; (2) cheating widows in their roles as guardians of their husband's estates; (3) sponging off the hospitality of widows; (4) mismanagement of widows' estates; (5) taking money from widows for lengthy prayers made on their behalf; (6) taking houses as pledges for debts that could not be paid.

And they did this to the most needy and vulnerable among them!

- **Matt. 6:24:** No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Superbowl & gambling)

- **1 Tim. 6:10:** For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. (Jesus cared for widows & most vulnerable!)

b. They make long prayers for pretense: Pretense: Make-believe, putting on an act, shamming, faking, play-

acting, posturing; deception, deceitfulness, fraud, trickery, dishonesty, hypocrisy, falsity, lying – they are hypocrites who love to be thought highly of by the people. They seek the glory of man nor the glory of God!

Jesus never had pretense! He's the most real, genuine, authentic, true Man Who ever lived, all for God's glory!

c. They shall receive greater condemnation: Judgment for these scribes & Pharisees will be very bad if they do not repent! False teachers beware! Hell will be hotter for them! (James 3:1)

By the grace of God, flee false teachers & false religion & pursue Christ, the heart of true religion.

3. False Teachers Have A Zeal For Evangelism But They Lead To Hell

Matthew 23:15: Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea & land to make a single proselyte, & when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

a. The scribes & Pharisees wanted to make converts to Judaism (proselytes): They did evangelism! They sacrificed to do evangelism! They made great sacrifices to do evangelism! They traveled across sea & land to make one single convert! They want others to follow the God of Israel as they thought they were following Him.

b. But they are children of hell: John 8:44: You are of your father the devil, & your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, & has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar & the father of lies. (They don't have Christ!)

c. The converts they make are twice as much children of hell as they are: They are not leading people to salvation but to damnation! And their followers become better at their Phariseism & blindness than they are!

Richard Baxter: Many have warned others that they come not to that place of torment, while yet they hastened to it themselves: many a preacher is now in hell, who hath a hundred times called upon his hearers to use the utmost care & diligence to escape it. Can any reasonable man imagine that God should save men for offering salvation to others, while they refuse it themselves; & for telling others those truths which they themselves neglect and abuse? Many a tailor goes in rags, that maketh costly clothes for others; & many a cook scarcely licks his fingers, when he hath dressed for others the most costly dishes. Believe it, brethren, God never saved any man for being a preacher, nor because he was an able preacher; but because he was a justified, sanctified man, & consequently faithful in his Master's work. Take heed, therefore, to yourselves first, that you be that which you persuade your hearers to be, & believe that which you persuade them to believe, & heartily entertain that Saviour whom you offer to them.

4. False Teachers Are Blind Guides Who Teach Lies & Lead People Astray

Matthew 23:16-22: Woe 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." ¹⁷ You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? ¹⁸ 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." ¹⁹ You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰ So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹ And whoever swears by the temple swears by it & by him who dwells in it. ²² And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God & by him who sits upon it.

a. The scribes & Pharisees are blind guides & blind fools & blind men: Revelation 3:15-17: I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

1) God opens the blind eyes of our hearts: Ephesians 1:18: having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you (Jesus is the light of the world!)

2) God sends people to open blind eyes through evangelism: Acts 26:17-18: I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light & from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins & a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

b. The scribes & Pharisees misused & misapplied God's good commandments about oaths, vows, & promises so that they could be dishonest & lie! They did this in two ways: 1) They restricted these commandments to the legal, court setting only.

2) They wrongly taught that if you swore by the gold of temple or by the gift on the altar, then you had to keep your promises, but if you swore by the temple or by the altar, then you didn't have to keep your promises. They did this so they could lie & be dishonest! Jesus forbids all of this.

a) First of all, Jesus shows them that their value system is wrong: The temple & the altar are what make the gold & the gift sacred! The temple & the altar are of greater value than the gold & the gift! They are blind! They don't understand God's values! They don't see what is most important to God! (Jesus is the temple! Jesus is the great sacrifice on the altar! Jesus is more precious than gold! Jesus is our greatest, inexpressible gift! On God's throne!)

D. A. Carson: Jesus insists that whatever a man swears by is related to God in some way, & therefore every oath is implicitly in God's name [All on the altar belongs to God; God dwelt in Temple; God sits on the throne in heaven!]

b) Second of all, Jesus has already taught us that your yes should be yes & your no should be no: Citizens of Christ's Kingdom tell the truth: **Matthew 5:37:** Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

Citizens of Christ's Kingdom love the truth, they tell the truth, & they love the truth & tell the truth because they know, trust, & love the God of truth! And they hate lies because lies are evil & come from the evil one, the father of lies: **John 8:44:** You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. **John 14:6**

- **Colossians 3:9-10:** Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

- **Proverbs 6:16-17:** There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: ¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue

- **Rev. 21:8:** But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, & all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

- **Martyn Lloyd-Jones:** As Christians, we should always speak as in the presence of God.

Are there ways, like the Pharisees, that you avoid telling the truth? Do you look for loopholes?

Brian Davis: Do you keep your word? When you say you are going to do something, do you do it? When you say you are going to be somewhere, are you there? Parents, when you tell your children you are going to do something, do you do it? Commitments at church? Do you confess it as sin when your yes is no?

By the grace of God, flee false teachers & false religion & pursue Christ, the heart of true religion.

Why do you sometimes act the way the scribes acted? What is the root of your problem? You make gods out of mere men. You find your joy & hope & satisfaction in the tiny little praises & honor of men. You may be hiding your own sin – you don't want people to really know who & what you are. God knows all & still loves you!

Do you remember those questions I began with: Whose glory do you most desire? Whose praise do you most desire? Whose acceptance do you most desire? Whose smile do you most want to be shining down on you? We most desperately need God's acceptance & God's smile! How do we get God's acceptance & smile?

Looking Unto Jesus: Jesus took God's greatest woe upon Himself on that cross! Jesus was counted as the worst of false teachers ever on that cross – He was counted as the false teacher of all false teachers! On the cross, Jesus had His face shut out of the kingdom of heaven! He didn't enter in, but was cut off & cast outside the camp! Jesus was devoured by the wrath of God! Jesus received the greatest condemnation on the cross! Jesus traveled from heaven to earth to save sinners! And on that cross He was made a countless number as much a child of hell so that we might never be children of hell! Jesus is the light of the world & the very wisdom of God, yet He was blindfolded & beaten & treated like a fool on that cross so that we might have the light of life in Him, see the King in His beauty, & possess the wisdom of God for ourselves for all eternity! He was not smiled upon, but God the Father forsook His Son on that cross so that we might be forever accepted & smiled upon by our Father in heaven!

And yet the Father did smile upon His Son as well on that cross! And He raised Him from the dead! And now in union with Christ, our Father smiles upon us & sings over us! God is in you! You are the light of the world & the salt of the earth! Jesus is our sure & certain guide Who leads us to heaven! He is the temple of God that was torn down & after three days was raised up so that we might be God's temple! He is our gold! He is our great sacred gift! He is our heaven! He is seated on the throne of God with all authority & power!

Jesus Received The Greater Condemnation-For Proud Lusters Of All Creation-That He Might Save From Every Nation-A Humble Bride Who Knows Salvation!

True love will say "Beware!" and warn
So from the Christ you won't be torn
To make you His our God has sworn
And gave His Son to take your scorn
On you great love He will adorn
So you will never be forlorn
Rejoice now, no longer mourn
You have new life – you've been reborn!

Jesus passionately loves His holy bride
Therefore His anger He can't hide
When evil teachers come with pride
And with their lives about God lied
Blind leaders toward destruction guide
And try to turn away His bride
From His true, pure, perfect side
They He will with strong judgments chide
And finally cast them all outside
Where hotter fires will not subside
But with the fires of judgment wide
Our Warrior-King came to collide
He quenched the fires right where He died
And turned God's fiery wrath aside
He conquered death and "Freedom!" cried
For all who'd turn and hate their pride
And trust the Son Who for them died
With Him they will in peace abide
He stands with loving arms out wide
To take you in and be your guide
In Him all things you can confide
All joys you need He will provide
He is your joy and love supplied
So come to Him – you must decide!

May God make us true and humble and meek
Not like the scribe – a prideful freak
Let's humbly ask for clear critique
And try to turn the other cheek
Let all fake motives to us reek
And honesty be our pure technique
For Christ's the treasure that we seek
May "Christ is all!" be what we speak
And also what we live each week
For though we are so poor and weak
Our Christ is strong – He's all unique!

Jesus had no robe to wear
They stripped Him down and pulled His hair
No lofty greetings He found there
They cursed and mocked Him with a glare
He had no seat – no stool or chair
Skin from His back the lash would tear
He loves you widows – don't despair!

For Mary's life He did prepare
To John He'd say: "She's in your care."
Devoured by God's wrath He'd bear
He would not pray to get a stare
"Why has God left!" was His meek prayer
To greatest condemnation He would square
With no one else He'll never share
That means you're free – He will declare:
"No condemnation will ensnare!"
For you, His Son, He did not spare
With Him there's none Who can compare!

Christ Jesus Opened The Kingdom For Every Tribe And Nation
And Put On Every Face An Amazing Jubilation
By Taking On Himself The Greatest Condemnation
He Would Not Enter In, But Was Cut Off Like Amputation
Was Made A Child Of Hell And Took Our Woes In Full Damnation
He's No Blind Guide At All But Our Light The Incarnation
The Only One With No Hypocrisy In Life Or Inclination
Traveled From Heaven To Earth To Die And Grant Salvation
Rose Up From The Dead Giving Sinners Justification
He Is God's Temple Pure Where We Worship With Adoration
He's More Precious Than Any Gold Of Greatest Valuation
He's On The Throne Of God With All Authority Coronation
So Trust In Him Alone As Your Only Propitiation
He'll Be Your All In All And Holy Fascination
So You'll Worship God Aright Without Pharisee Profanation
He'll Be Your Greatest Joy And Eternal Celebration
And Bring Into Your Life A Never Ending Reformation!

By the grace of God, flee false teachers & false religion & pursue Christ, the heart of true religion.