

Matthew Ch. 23

Ch 23 is still a continuation of ch 22, which was a continuation of ch 21, in other words, time wise it hasn't been several days or anything like that over these last few ch. Now we've looked at them over the last few weeks, but at the time it was one continuous happening. and In ch 22 it begins with a parable of a wedding feast by which Jesus testifies to the Jews (though speaking directly to the Pharisees) that the kingdom of God is going to be stripped away from them and given over to the gentiles. He emphasizes how God has out stretched His hand to them over and over again, inviting them to be apart of the kingdom and yet they continually rejected that invitation and treated the prophets spitefully, seized them and killed them.

So the King rejected those who were initially invited, and turned to a people who were just kind of out there, who would've never expected a royal invitation to a wedding feast, they were those who were just wandering aimlessly along the highways with out hope and with out direction. and That (my friends) was you and me, not worthy by any means to be invited into the kingdom and yet God out of His grace and mercy extends that invitation to us to come and be filled, to have our deepest hunger satisfied and to take part of the feast. But there's only one way to get in to the feast and to be accepted by the King and that's to be clothed in the wedding garment that He freely provides, and that garment, or that covering is the righteous covering provided for us in Christ. Apart from being robed with His righteousness and being covered in the garments of salvation by believing in Him and trusting in the finished work of the cross, we will by no means enter in. But rather as it states in vs 13 of ch 22 that person will be taken away and cast into outer darkness: where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. You can come if you want, the invitation is there, and if you respond to the Kings invitation He will choose you to be apart of the feast. But responding to Him means accepting that garment of salvation that's found in none other than Jesus Christ because there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved.

Then Jesus underwent this series of scrutinizing questions by the Pharisees and as I stated (last week) their intentions were to find fault with Him and discredit Him before the people so that the multitudes would be swayed from Him. But in reality since that Passover was with in a week or so, God was using this time to show that His Lamb was indeed with out spot and blemish and that He was a worthy sacrifice for the sin of the world. You see, the book of Ex says that a few days before Passover (I'm paraphrasing) you were to take this lamb that you were going to sacrifice and keep it for 3-4 days (the 4th day being the day of sacrifice). Now during that time, not only would you grow personally attached to the sacrifice, but you would also examine it to ensure that it was indeed a worthy sacrifice, and in order to qualify it had to be with out spot and blemish.

So to it was necessary that a few days before the Lamb of God would be sacrificed that He undergo a close examination to be found worthy as well, and of course through all the testing of the scribes, and Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees, He was indeed found, spotless, and with out fault.

Now in ch 23 we come to the last public sermon of Jesus as recorded in Matt. And He's still there in of with in the temple precinct. and Remember this is just days before His death, and that interests me because if you were only days from death and you knew it. and You held a captive audience and could share with them anything you like what would it be. You might think that it would be one of salvation and hope, trust in the Lord with all your heart in this life, He will never leave you nor forsake you, and then an invitation to receive eternal life, something like that. But Jesus took a much more opposite approach; His was a message of condemnation and denunciation of the religious leaders and hierarchy of the day. If you had by some chance never heard Jesus in public before and you just happened into the temple right about now, you'd think man, this is a real hellfire and brimstone kind of a preacher. Because Jesus is going to let go and hold nothing back, and we'll see Him vehemently come against the scribes and Pharisees.

Now the apostle Paul wrote that it is the goodness of God that leads men to repentance and that is no doubt true. At least it was for me, but there are others who don't respond to that approach, Jude said, "*on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.*" In other words there are those who when they hear of the love and grace of God, melt before the throne into the hands of God that God could love such a sinner as them. But others are much more callused than that and they don't respond to that approach, and to them it is sometimes necessary to reveal to them the reality of judgment, because we will all have a relationship to Jesus Christ to some He will be their Savior, to others He will be their judge.

I Have experienced that in my own personal life, when I 1st got saved I used to share the love of God with all my worldly buddies, most of them were musicians. A few of them responded to the love of God. But 1 in particular that I can think of, always basically blew me off when I would share with him in that light, but one day I was riding with him in his truck over to another guys house. and I don't remember how the subject of hell came up but it did, and I was just sharing about the reality of hell, how the fire was never quenched and people would be gnawing their tongues in pain, and that they would be infested with worms that would never die. All of that stuff the bible says, and man he perked up, he always thought that hell was going to be an endless party with all the rock stars that he wanted to meet. Well needless to say after that conversation he gave his heart to Jesus and he's still holding tight to Him today.

But you see Jesus had spent 3 years preaching the love and the grace and the goodness of His Father, but these religious guys just wouldn't budge or repent and turn to God, and so as a final warning Jesus gives a word of judgment. So learn from that example in your own approach, share the love and grace and goodness of God with people, but if they don't respond, maybe they need to feel the heat a little bit. Ask God to open the door for you to share the reality of judgment with them and tell them that Jesus died and rose again and shed His blood to spare them that judgment. Let's look at ch 23, Jesus final public sermon according to Matt.

Vs1-2

If you have a NAS version it says something like the scribes and Pharisees have seated *themselves* in Moses' seat.

Vs3

In other words these guys stand in a position by which they expound on or explain the law to the people, and so as far as what they say, when they are teaching you the law of Moses, do it, it's right, the law is right. (Finish vs) Again this is another reference just like He made just a little bit earlier when He said (speaking to the Pharisees) tell Me what you think.

A man had 2 sons, he told one of them to go to work in the field and the son said, no way I'm not working today, but later he felt bad and so he went. To the other one he said the same thing and he said OK dad, I'll go, but he didn't go, which one really did the will of the Father. They said, the 1st and Jesus said, that's right, and whole idea behind the parable when you study it is that they represented the 2nd son, the one who said they would work for the father but didn't.

That's what Jesus is saying here, they say, but they don't do. The NT is very emphatic in it's teaching that we are to be doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving ourselves. Think about who Jesus is talking to here, the most avid churchgoers of His day. Just coming to church and hearing a neat sermon for 45 minutes or so a week, doesn't get anybody into heaven or good standings with God. If you believe that you're deceived, James said you show me your faith with out your works and I'll show you my faith *by* my works. Paul the apostle told Titus, "*I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.*" Titus 3:8 Now these Pharisees would share the law and that was right, but they themselves weren't upholding it as God had intended for it to be and they would teach as doctrines the traditions and commandments of men.

Vs4

Interesting contrast, how that Jesus said come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. That's the difference between religion vs a personal relationship with Jesus Christ Religion will weigh you down with legalism, a big rule book of does and don'ts and it's like a heavy burden. In the book of Acts when the gentiles began to receive Jesus and they were trying to follow the Lord, these Pharisees came along and were trying to get them to keep the law of Moses and have them circumcised rather than allowing them to enjoy their freedom in Christ. and Peter stood up and said, "*why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*"

They were trying to entangle them in legalism, that's what Jesus is talking about here, they make you do all this stuff that weighs you down and it becomes a burden to serve God. Let me tell you something, if you're finding it a burden to serve the Lord, you've entered into some arena somewhere that God never intended for you to. Because Jesus' burden is light, it's a joy to serve the Lord, not a burden. and It could be that you're teetering on legalism yourself, and that you're getting all tangled up in a web a legalism that you've spun for yourself, when Jesus came to set you free. (Finish vs)

That's something else about religion, not only is it a heavy drag, and yoke of bondage, but I find that most religious people have a double standard, that's what Jesus is saying here. They have one standard for themselves and another for everybody else, they're more than willing to tell you how to live but they're not right in their own hearts before God.

Vs5

Notice how everything about religion is exactly the opposite of what Jesus taught. Jesus said, "*Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*" and He said, "*when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.*"

What's an earmark of religion? It seek the glory of man, not the glory of God, religious people are always doing things in such a way so that other people see them and think man look how spiritual they are. The example that Jesus brings up in regards to the Pharisees is that of the phylacteries and the enlarging of the borders of their garments. The phylacteries were little leather boxes that they would strap to their foreheads and their left arm and they would have certain passages of scripture in them in literal fulfillment of Ex 13:16 and Duet 6:8.

Well they would make their phylacteries real broad so that they appeared more spiritual than the average guy with the little phylacteries. Same basic thing with the borders of their garments, they would hang these tassels from them in obedience to Num 15:37,38 in order to remind them to keep the commandments of God. But they made theirs great big so that everyone was sure to notice how mindful of the word of God they were. Again looking for the praise of men.

Vs 6

Same principal here, they love that place of honor, the place that makes them the center of attention, and that really makes them look like they're somebody. But again what did Jesus teach? *“When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

So Jesus is painting a very sharp contrast between these religious leaders and what it is to truly serve God. One way drips with pride, loves the praise of man. The other chooses the pathway of humility and service to other people and seeks to glorify the Lord, tries to do good works in such a way that when people see them their Father in heaven is glorified. These guys loved to be admired by man,

Vs7

The word Rabbi is a transliteration from a Hebrew word that means “my great one.” and it was used exclusively for these great teachers. It would sort of be like calling someone “doctor” so and so today. It kind of sets them apart in a slightly elevated manner over the rest of us. and Don't get me wrong I encourage study and if you get your doctorates degree that's great, but don't think it somehow makes you more divine and less human. You ever introduce yourself to someone and they return the address, as hi I'm “doctor” so and so, and you think oh man, this is somebody special. Jesus is saying that's the kind of thing they love.

Vs8

In other words Jesus is saying hey, titles are for the birds, no one is better than anyone else and you shouldn't seek to be set above other people by means of a title. Whether it be, reverend, or rabbi or whatever, we're all just brothers and sisters in Christ. Sometimes people want to know how to address me, by my name, the same way you would anyone else, I just serve Jesus, don't put me on a pedestal put Jesus on one, He is the only one that is to be exalted.

Vs9

You say Jeff, how does the Roman Catholic church deal with this? I have no idea, it seems pretty clear to me and I personally would have a real problem calling any man father so and so in light of this vs. Now, Jesus is not saying not to call your biological father, father, He's speaking about titles that elevate one man above another and he says don't do it.

Vs10

John echoed this same concept when he said, in 1 John 2:27 "*you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.*" In other words he's not saying that we don't need come to church and hear the teaching of the word of God, that would be completely contrary to the totality of scripture. He's saying that when you come, if you receive insight or learn something from God's word, it's not due to whoever it happens to be that's up there flapping their jaw. That man is simply a vessel, the only way that you are brought into understanding of the word is of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit opens your heart and your mind to understand it. If He doesn't do that I can talk until I'm blue in the face and you won't get it. It's Jesus who is our teacher, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Vs11-12

We've gone over that concept many times so this morning we'll let it slide but just know that true godliness will bring about humility and servant hood in your life. Not pride and self-exaltation, and Jesus Himself serves as our example who being God, didn't come to be served, but to serve and if He's our Lord, how much more should we serve one another, and the hurt and dying world around us.

That was Jesus' address to the disciples and the multitudes, now He turns specifically towards the Pharisees and begins to lay into them, no holds barred. He will pronounce 8 woe's upon them, the word "woe" meaning, "how terrible it will be" or terrible things are in store for you. It's almost the opposite of Blessed. Which brings up an interesting point, Jesus is here ending His last public sermon with 8 woe's, think back with me to the 1st public sermon that we have in the book of Matt and how did Jesus begin His public ministry? By pronouncing 8 blessings, we know them as the beatitudes and these 8 woe's stand obviously in sharp contrast of the 8 blessings.

Vs13

What was the 1st beatitude? "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" The Pharisees weren't poor in spirit, they were proud in spirit, and as the result Jesus said not only were they shut out of the kingdom themselves but they were preventing others who were headed in the right direction from going in because of the way that they were discipling them.

Vs14

The mourners will be comforted, those who do things for show, not sincere in their hearts, will be condemned. They would prey on little old ladies for their big donations to the synagogue; things haven't changed that much.

There are still those today who do the same thing, they come straight into their living rooms by means of the TV and rip them off in the name of God. Jesus says that that will bring greater condemnation upon their lives. Again notice the difference in the way that Jesus treated or approached those who knew that they were sinners vs those who thought they were better than everybody else and wanted the praise of man.

To the woman at the well, who had had 5 husbands and was living in sin with another man right then, Jesus was so tender. He told her of the living water that could quench that thirst of hers that caused her to be unsatisfied with the things of this world. You remember the woman that was caught in the very act of adultery, and the Pharisees brought her to Jesus and said the law says she should be stoned, what do you say? Jesus said, I say let him among you whose with out sin cast the 1st stone. and Then He stooped down and began to write in the sand and it says that from the oldest on down being convicted by their conscience they all left.

Jesus stood up and said woman, where have your accusers gone has no one condemned you? and She said, no one, Lord. And Jesus said to her, neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more. He was so gentle to her, leading her to repentance. But these guys thought they had it all together, they would pray prayers like thank you Lord that I'm not like other men or gentiles or dogs. They were self righteous, and prideful, thought they were perfect, they were truly "holier than thou's" they had this pretense of being so spiritual and they carried themselves as though they were spiritually superior than everyone else. and Jesus came down heavy on these types of people.

Vs15-22

They had what they purported to be oaths that were binding and others that weren't. Kind of making a promise with your fingers crossed kind of a thing. Here Jesus is exposing the absurdity of that type of mentality. An oath is an oath and that's it, it doesn't matter what you swear by, nothing justifies a lie no matter how you preface it. and If you have to swear in order to make someone believe you, you're in sad shape anyway. Jesus said don't swear at all, just let your yes be yes and your no be no, He said that anything more than that is from the evil one. The point is to be a man or a woman of integrity, be a person of your word, if your having to back up your word by swearing then you need to repent anyway for violating so many peoples trust that they don't believe you anymore. That's called sin.

Vs 23

They were so meticulous that they would pay the tithes of even the seeds of the plants from their gardens. 9 seeds for me 1 seed for God, but yet they would neglect those things that were so crucial to God. Jesus said blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy, these guys were critical and belittling. Now Jesus commends them for tithing, He says you're doing what's right there. These things you ought to have done, but not to the neglect of the others.

Vs24

They were nit picky, they majored on minors, a gnat was the smallest of the unclean bugs and these guys would strain their drinks just incase a gnat happened to fly into it and they by chance ate blood which was against the law. But Jesus said you may as well of swallowed a camel, which was the largest unclean beast in Palestine. In other words they are hypocritical, and have double standards, and we have to be careful to guard against this trap today. J Vernon McGee speaks of a woman that he used to know that thought that lipstick was from the pit of hell, but she was the biggest gossip he'd ever known. and So many times we can do those sorts of things, we strain out a gnat and swallow a camel, we become hypocrites.

Vs 25-28

We don't have time to spend much time here, but both examples speak of the same thing, and that's this: God is searching the heart 1 Sam 16:7 says, "*the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*" Everything these guys did was for an external appearance of godliness so that they would be looked upon as spiritual leaders. But inwardly they were hypocritical, full of deceit and wickedness and their hearts were no where near God. God is not impressed with how we are able to cause other people to think highly of us by the way that we act around them. All He cares about is one thing where are you at with Him in your heart. If your heart is right with God, then everything else will fall in line. If the inside is clean then the rest of the vessel will be cleansed; holiness is worked from the inside out by means of the heart through a personal relationship with God. Not the outside in by means of rules and regulations and legalistic religion.

Vs29-32

These men honored the prophets whom there forefathers killed and yet they were about to kill the One whom all the prophets were pointing to, this is where it all climaxed and they were only testifying against themselves. (Repeat vs 32) Finish what they started.

Vs33

Wow! When you hear these words come from the mouth of Jesus you are in serious need of repentance.

Vs34

Many of those things come to pass in the book of Acts.

Vs35-36

In other words this is where it all stops, this is the boiling point, why, because it was going to climax with the death of Jesus whom they were all pointing to. From Abel the 1st recorded martyr, to Zechariah (a reference to 2nd Chron 24) 2nd Chron being the last book in the Hebrew bible. So from A-Z it all comes down on them.

Vs37

Another of the Gospels tells us that Jesus was weeping at this point, He wasn't angry with them, His heart was breaking for them and He was trying to wake them up. But in this vs lies the key "you were not willing" God is willing to take you in and be the rock of your salvation, but so many are not willing and it breaks His heart. He wants to spare you the consequences of your sin, but only if you're willing to let Him.

Vs38

Notice, "your house" in regards to the temple, not God's house, why? Because God is no longer there this is basically the last plea.

Vs39

A reference to His 2nd coming, one day they will see Jesus as their Savior and welcome Him as such, but until that time God has turned to the gentiles. and As a result we have the wonderful opportunity of salvation.

Don't harden your heart against the Lord let Him gather you in and be a shelter and a shield about you.