

Matthew 21-03-21a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It's good to have everyone with us.

We are going to continue our study this morning in the Gospel of Matthew and we're starting a new chapter, chapter 16. Chapter 16, we'll take a moment as we begin to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study. This study as always is very timely.

It is a pertinent source of observation, interpretation and application for us in our times. And we're gonna really see that this morning as Jesus confronts the opposition that has formalized itself and has taken root and shape as much as it did at the beginning of the introduction of this opportunity for Israel. It is going to take place now at the height of Jesus' ministry.

So a very fortuitous and beneficial chapter is opening before us. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll begin. Father, how grateful we are for another opportunity to set aside the cares and the constraints, the challenges, the obligations of this life to focus on our most important obligation which is ensuring that we're living a life of faith and obedience before you.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that your Holy Spirit will make it clear to us, help us to understand it and to see how it pertains and how we can make application in our thinking and in our activities in the time that remains to us in this life. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Let's begin by reading our chapter.

We have seen the feeding of the 5,000, the Syrophenician woman, the feeding of the 4,000. We've seen the healing of the multitudes and the significance of that. And we come now to chapter 16 of the gospel of Matthew.

Then, and this is after Jesus left in the boat and went to the regions of Magadan, not Magdala. Attraction to Mary Magdalene has caused that change, but this is Magadan. Mark tells us it's in the region of Dalmanutha.

Nobody knows where either one of those is. It was that obscure. This is kind of like saying he went to Bushy Head, Oklahoma.

People that don't have Google maps would never find it. In fact, you can drive through it and not find it. So he has gone to a place where he cannot soon be followed.

Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came and testing him, asked that he would show them a sign from heaven. Every word in that verse is important. Then Jesus answered and said to them, when it is evening, you say, fair weather.

You can scratch out, it will be. When it is evening, you say, fair weather, for the sky is

red. And in the morning, foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.

Hypocrites, you know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. And he left them and departed." You can see a couple of text notes there.

And it is unclear whether the word hypocrites should be there or not. The internal evidence favors it, the external evidence discourages it, i.e. the sense of the passage. But part of the reason is that you do find some of these terms in the parallels in either Mark or Luke.

Doesn't really matter because we're gonna take a quick look at the Pharisees and Sadducees. They have come to prominence here. And it begins when it says, then the Pharisees and Sadducees.

This is one case where your English text really looks like the Greek. Do you notice there is just one T-H-E there? There's one, the. And you remember, I've shared this with you a few times before, especially when you're singing, there's a difference in the and the.

Is this the Pharisees or the Pharisees in English? This is free, no charge. It's the Pharisees. When do you say the? As though there's an extra E in the word.

If the noun begins with a vowel. So the apple does not fall far from the tree, the apple. If you say the apple, it doesn't come out as clearly.

So it's the, when you have a consonant. So Pharisees starts with a phi, right? So it's the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians. But if you had aristocrats, it would be the aristocrats.

Free, no charge, you can worry about that later. But there's only one article here. And this is really quite striking if you understand the socio-political situation in Israel at this time, because the Pharisees and Sadducees are like Democrats and Republicans.

Could you imagine then the Democrats and the Republicans came and testing him asked, who could unite diametrically opposed parties but Jesus? But they're not united in their support. They are united in their opposition. And this is one thing, one of the few things, maybe the only thing they can agree on is that the message of Jesus, the gospel of the kingdom is a bad thing for them both.

So the impact that the ministry of Jesus is beginning to have in the nation. The last time I saw a real unity in this country, and most of you are old enough to remember it was 9-11. Politics was set aside for some weeks, a few months maybe.

We really united against the common enemy. People weren't worried about political

differences. We were worried about a potential threat to safety, to the lives of any more Americans if further terrorism was to take place.

And that was what it took to get people to forget their political and other sources of division and come together to unite against a common foe. Well, that's about the level that it would take to unite the Pharisees and Sadducees. And you know this from the later chapters of Acts.

You remember when Paul gets arrested and he says, it's for the hope of the resurrection that I'm on trial. And the Pharisees and Sadducees get at each other's throat because the Pharisees believe in the resurrection and the Sadducees don't. That is why they are sad.

You see, they don't think there's a resurrection. They don't believe in angels or spirits. And you know, what a sad outlook.

Well, for them to come together here is very significant. And it's emphasized that they are lumped under one article, the Pharisees and Sadducees. This is, it's almost the rule that says some pastors and teachers, you know, there's grammatical ways that you can unite two things into one.

And that's what has happened here. They're so united that they only get one the between them. Well, what do we know about the Pharisees and Sadducees? We first saw them introduced in this book way back in chapter three.

And when did they appear in those days? You can go back to Matthew chapter three. And these are the days of John the Baptist. You have the birth narrative complete.

And John is out there in camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist in verse four of chapter three. He's eating locusts and wild honey. Jerusalem, all Judea and all the region around the Jordan went out to him.

In verse five, Matthew 3, six. All Jerusalem, well, Jerusalem, all Judea and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when John saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, what? You sons of snakes, you brood of vipers, you're hatchlings of serpents.

You remember in the ancient Near East, when you say something is the son of something, it is close identification. They were going to condemn Jesus because he claims to be the son of God, making himself out to be God. Sons of Belial were associated with idolatry and with pagan worship.

Sons of Abraham hoped to be thought of as being faithful and obedient as he was. So when you call a group of religious leaders, sons of snakes, this isn't going to sit well. It

sounds kind of classical when you say brood of vipers, but this was a deeply cutting insult.

Look at you, you baby snakes. You're the offspring of serpents. Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? And the picture here is the one that you also find in Acts with the apostle Paul.

Do you remember after the shipwreck, when they come on shore, they're all soaking wet. They had already thrown everything overboard. The boat has crashed on the rocks and they crawl ashore.

They're trying to get warm. They find a way to make a fire. They're gathering wood to put on that fire.

And a serpent comes out of that wood and bites Paul on the arm. And everybody looks astonished because this is a highly poisonous viper that produces death. In just a few minutes, Paul shakes it off and no harm comes to him.

And they recognize that the same God who made the promise that if they did what Paul told them to do, stayed with the ship, that no lives would be lost, is the same God who is preserving Paul from physical harm. And this impresses them. But the snake comes out of the wood.

So you put the wood, you gather brush and so on, you grab stuff that might've washed up on the shore. If you've seen high tide marks, a lot of times there's driftwood and such. And so they've gathered, this is put on the fire, the far, I live in Oklahoma.

Well, the snake is leaving because he doesn't want to burn. Anytime you burn a brush, Paul, you have to watch if that brush pile has been there a while because various kinds of animal life will emerge. So when he says, who warned you to flee, you snakes, it's everyone has had this experience that when you are going to burn the wood, if there's any snakes in it, they're going to leave.

Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore, bear fruits worthy of change of mind. You've come out here symbolically, ostentatiously to be seen by men. You want to be part of this movement because it's popular.

The people from all over the region are coming out here and you feel like you're losing your sway and losing your position. So you've come out here to be seen by them as a part of this very popular thing. Since you've come out here and you're actually sons of snakes, if you really want to make a difference, change your minds and change of mind will have fruit.

Bear fruit worthy of change of mind. The only way you can bear that fruit is to change your mind, have a different attitude instead of living your life to please people and to be

seen by them and to be approved by them. Change your mind away from dead works and have faith in God and bear fruit that reflects that.

Don't think to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. I've just called you sons of snakes. You say, no, we're sons of Abraham.

Don't think that. I say to you, God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these rocks. What does he mean by that? You have no accountability or responsibility for what you cannot control.

The fact that you were born into Israel as descendants of the 12 tribes and Isaac and Abraham before that, that gives you no credit. You had no control over that. There should be neither approbation or condemnation based on birth.

In other words, John reflects God's attitude that human evaluation should be based on merit, not on birth. God believes in meritocracy. The kingdom of the son, the millennial kingdom is a meritocracy.

The kingdom of the father, which follows it and lasts eternally is a meritocracy. Those who are in and those who are out are separated by what they chose and what they did. What kind of fruit did your life bear? Did it bear fruit worthy of repentance or did it bear fruit that reflects superficiality, short-sightedness, self-interest, self-gratification, a good old boys club on earth where we look at each other and approve because of what we say and what we do, what we approve and what we don't.

You observe signs and seasons and days and years. You approve yourself based on how often you wash your hands and what you do and don't eat, things that perish with the using. Jesus said, do not lay up for yourself treasure like that on earth where moth and rot corrupt and thieves break in and steal.

Lay up for yourself treasure in heaven. So bear fruits worthy of repentance. Don't think my birth is good enough to make me worthy.

Rocks can be sons of Abraham. You've heard the expression, dumber than a box of rocks. This is implied in John's rebuke.

Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water with a view toward repentance.

The kind of repentance that produces a change in the fruit of your life, the focus of your life, the priorities, the goals, the values that you reflect in daily living should reflect change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God. Of course, I'm quoting there from Hebrews chapter six. He who was coming after me is mightier than I whose sandals I'm not worthy to carry.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. Jesus said, I've not come to bring peace, but a sword it is going to divide.

A winnowing fan divides. He will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor, gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. That's what John had to say about the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Normally these were two quite distinct groups. The two different kinds of snakes, if you will. The Pharisees were the legalists.

They were the traditionalists. They were very stern in their approach to holiness. And there were a lot of them.

They were not just in Jerusalem. They were scattered through the nation. You can find them in Galilee.

And we saw this back in chapter nine and we saw it in chapter 12. They were mentioned twice in chapter nine being in Galilee. That was 9.3 and 9.11. 9.11 ought to be easier to remember.

And then again in chapter 12, verse two, verse 14, verse 24, and verse 38. But if you look through chapter 12, you can see these Galilean Pharisees are giving Jesus a hard time and opposing him. Now for the same reason that these who come from Jerusalem do so.

But by virtue of numbers, they were more popular in the run-of-the-mill common man mode. The common man figured the Pharisees were the ones that had religion and righteousness figured out. And so by virtue of their numbers, they carried the population with them.

And if you wanted to know what was right or what was wrong, you would ask a nearby Pharisee because they were thought to be the standard. But their standard was based on the law and on rabbinical traditions and rabbinical additions and accretions. And they had created this big heavy wrapper around the law.

And there's a candy bar or a piece of food on the inside. And then you've got the wrapper that's got all of the nutrition information. Well, the Pharisees had put a wrapper around the law and they would tell you what was important and how it should be, what constitutes work on the Sabbath, what constitutes a Sabbath day's journey, what does and does not defile you.

They had all of this worked out and you couldn't get past the wrapper to the actual nutritive value, spiritually speaking of the law because they had put such heavy, thick wrappings around it and were telling you all of this stuff. So they were so regulated and so over-traditionalized that they had created this system of self-righteousness and they

patted themselves and each other on the back for their righteousness, gave each other righteousness awards and touted each other and lifted each other up and quoted each other on religious matters. And the result was what has been called a hollow formalism.

And we have had echoes and repeat performances of this kind of thing in denominational Christianity where what really matters is what pew do you sit in, what music do you approve, what sort of robes do you wear, what rituals do you perform, how often do you celebrate the Lord's table, what kind of baptism do you embrace, do you tithe, how much do you show up on the off nights for church, do you support the missionaries, do you, all of these activities that can be quantified and observed are the measure of your Christianity. What ministries does your large church operate? How many women's ministries? How many children's ministries? How many trips do they take? How many, when I was a kid, they would have about once a month take all the youth group to the putt-putt golf course or go skiing or go to one of the amusement parks as a church group. And so the parents could say, well, my child has squeaky clean fellowship because they go to the church group.

And I can tell you from personal experience, there can be a lot of evil in a church youth group of both the overt and covert kind. I was in church youth groups that were viciously partisan or cliquish or dismissive and insulting to outsiders and approving and warming and welcoming to the insiders. Is your family rich or poor? Where do they live? What does your daddy do? If your daddy's an elder or a deacon, well, you've got automatic power and sway.

If your father drives in from the hinterlands and plays one of the instruments, you're in a completely different class. You're the servant class, we're the elite. You cannot believe, maybe you can.

Some of you, a lot of you may have been in similar situations where there is the elite and then there is the common. And this is why Jesus called them hypocrites, hypocrites. Keep your finger here.

We've turned back to Matthew chapter three to see what John had to say. Turn forward in your Bible to Matthew chapter 23. We haven't even got to the Sadducees yet.

We're looking at the Pharisees. If you look at Matthew chapter 22, verse 15, after Jesus spends 14 verses talking about the kingdom and telling the parable of the wedding feast and the invitees refused to come because they have better things to do. The king heard about it.

He was furious in verse seven. He sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, the wedding is ready.

Those who were invited were not worthy. Those who were invited were not worthy. You

see that in 22, eight, we'll get here not too distant future.

Verse 14, many are called, but few are chosen. Many are called, but few are chosen. Why are few chosen? Because few are worthy.

How do you become worthy? What did John say at the beginning of Matthew? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Change your mind and be consistent in that new set of priorities and your life bears fruit. You are now worthy.

Is this grace or works? By works are you saved by becoming worthy? We're not talking about salvation here. This is not salvation. This is, are you worthy of the kingdom? You don't even qualify for any kingdom if you're not a believer.

Once you are a believer and you acknowledge God, did the Pharisees believe in God? Do they believe that there is a God of Israel? And that he can raise the dead? Absolutely. They are believers, Pharisees are believers. Salvation is not the question.

When they come out to John and he says, you brood of snakes, bear fruit worthy of repentance. He's not saying get saved and then get baptized. He's saying, change your mind and start living according to the higher parts of the law, the better parts of the law.

Jesus says the very same thing. Those who enter the wedding feast are those who are worthy because they respond to the call. Many are called who responds, who gets with the program, who makes themselves worthy.

This, you know, reform theologians begin to vibrate in place when you start talking about worthiness. But Jesus talks about it. John the Baptist talked about it.

The apostle Paul talks about it. He gives a list of bad practices and evil lifestyles to Timothy. And he says, if a young man will cleanse himself from these, if he will cleanse himself and avoid these bad practices, bad priorities, bad lifestyle, sinful, evil practice, he will be a vessel of honor.

All the Calvinists want to talk about is vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, vessels of honor in Romans, go to Timothy. What determines whether you're a vessel of wrath or a vessel of honor? The same thing Jesus says here. Many are called, but few are chosen.

Who is chosen? It's not a random inscrutable decision on the sovereignty of God. It's based on who responds, bear fruit worthy of repentance. Why would John tell this to Pharisees? If they're not elect, not saved, why tell somebody bear fruit and keeping the repentance if they're not going to do it? Because they can't, because they're not elect.

It's just crazy. But look at verse 15 of chapter 22 of Matthew. Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle him in his talk.

Verse 23, the same day, the Sadducees who say there is no resurrection came to him

and challenged him. They're going to try to entangle him with the Leveret law. Leveret, by the way, is lowercase because it's not talking about the tribe of Levi.

Leveret has to do with the brother taking up the cause of a fallen brother and taking care of his family. Then verse 34, the Pharisees heard that he silenced the Sadducees. They gathered together and went to ask him a question, a lawyer, a law expert.

What is the greatest commandment? Look at verse 41 of Matthew 22. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question. Verse 46, no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question him anymore.

It's not going to work entangling him in his talk. Can you imagine? If you had any idea of who the Lord Jesus is, you seriously think you're going to get him to trip over his tongue or say something that could be construed as incorrect. Then verse one of chapter 23, Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples.

The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do that, but do not do according to their works, for they say and do not do. When you hear the law communicated, do that.

They bind, look at verse four, they bind heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on men's shoulders. Pertinent at the current day, at the current time, the current moment. They bind heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

All their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. Want to be sure you can see how righteous I am.

Let me display, let me mention my good works. Let me post or have my assistants and my lackeys and my factoti, that's the plural of factotum. My factoti are going to make social media posts and let you know the charities that I support and the good works that I do and the standards that I set and the burdens that I demand to be inflicted on others.

Well, we have a lot more to say about this, but just remember the key to avoiding this and not just avoiding practicing this, but avoiding being held captive by its power. How can we avoid having heavy burdens laid on us that the people who position them and the people who create them and the people who want to strap them onto our shoulders don't even carry themselves? How do we avoid that? Go back to what John said at the beginning, bear fruit in keeping with repentance. There's an ax laid at the root of the tree.

Which trees are going to get cut down? The fruitless trees. It's not difficult to be faithful and obedient when we recognize that when the word of God is communicated by whoever communicates it, that observe and do. But the example that is being set by people who superficially and hypocritically talk about righteousness, Jesus says, don't do

according to their works.

Do according to what the word says, not according to what people say are good works. And there is a more and more clear divide between those two things in our present day than there has been in this country in maybe since it became a nation. Never has there been such a divide between what society and social media says is righteousness and what the word of God says is righteousness.

So what are we going to listen to? What are we going to practice? What are we going to prioritize? What kind of fruit are we going to bear? Are we recognizing that man looks on the outward appearance, the Lord looks on the heart? The word of God is a critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The word of God is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. The word of God corrects, not fellow man.

The Holy Spirit and the word of God is all the corrective we need. It's up to us to heed it, to seek it out, to hear and heed is on us. What do we hear? What do we heed? That's the key.

Well, we're going to pick up here and take a further in-depth look at the Pharisees and the Sadducees because this is the context that is going to characterize the remainder of Jesus' ministry, this opposition. Why do they oppose him? What is the nature of that opposition? Speaks directly to why are you and I opposed in this day? And what is the nature of that opposition? How do we meet it? How do we respond to it? The Lord Jesus gives us the answer and we will see that here after the break.