

Matthew 22-01-09a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is 9 January 2022. We're in Matthew chapter 23 and we're continuing our look at the Lord Jesus addressing, confronting the religious leadership of his day.

There's a lot of pertinence and applicability in this section for us. In the same way that our post-exilic prophets study, I think is a helpful look at the time near the close of an age where the last of God's revelation is being given to Israel so that they can prepare for the coming of the Messiah. These final words of Jesus during Passion Week, this is on Tuesday, he is going to be arrested the following night and crucified on Thursday.

So these words are profound as they would ever be, but especially given their timing. It is, these are the last things as it were. So as we approach the end of our own age and whether we are young or old, we're getting day by day closer to the end of our own excursion here on this earth.

It is especially applicable for us to look at these truths and try to finish strong. Let's take a moment to God's blessing on our study, on our fellowship, cultivate the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit so that we can get the most from looking at these wonderful words of life. Shall we pray? Father, we are so grateful for your presence in our midst through the ministry of your spirit, the power of your word, the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, the promises and the principles and the doctrines that you have supplied to us that are a living truth, not merely words on paper or a system of thought or a structure of regulations.

We have a living faith, we have an active relationship with you, which is our privilege through the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are thankful for that and we pray that as we spend this time together looking at your word and seeking a better understanding of how we can implement it and make it flame and live in our own lives, we ask that your Holy Spirit will guide us, lead us into the truth, and nudge us and keep it present in our thoughts as we seek to redeem the time and make the most of the period that is left to us before the Lord Jesus returns to take us to himself. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's read our passage. That's always a good start, especially with all of the distractions and variegated challenges that we face during the week.

It's nice to get a quick refresher of where we are in the Gospel of Matthew. We saw the two questions that were posed to Jesus by the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and then the question that Jesus himself posed at the end of chapter 22 last time. If the Messiah is called Lord by David, how is he his son? This confronts the Pharisees in a powerful way with the necessity of there being a divine component in the Messiah's nature that he must be more than man.

He must reside somewhere between the highest man in Israel, David, and God himself. There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. They are confounded.

They are unable to answer, but they refuse to assent. They refuse to change their minds. They refuse to believe.

I don't know about you, but this scares me to death. It scares me. Think about this scene.

Here you are with the finest theological education that can be had in the day. You are standing listening to the greatest teacher this world has ever seen or will ever see. He is perfect.

He is the Son of God. He is teaching the Old Testament Scriptures. He makes an unchallengeable, uncontrovertible point from the Scriptures, and obdurate hearts refuse to acknowledge that truth because of what it means, because of what it portends.

They would have to admit that they have been wrong about him. They would have to admit that, as Nicodemus does in John chapter three, no one could say and do the things that Jesus says and does unless he were from God, occupying a place higher than King David. It is inevitable.

It is incontrovertible. It is unanswerable, but they are making a choice. They choose not to accept that truth.

They choose not to act on that truth. They choose not to have a repentant heart and a change of mind. What more convincing would you need? You say, well, maybe a sign from heaven.

Jesus has been doing signs for three years. Some of these men have personally witnessed withered hands being healed, lifelong lame men taking up their bed to walk, the blind seeing, the deaf hearing. It is as much as God can present, and they do not accept.

As you see in the book of Hebrews, beware, be careful, lest there be in any of you this obdurate, unrepentant heart of unbelief. This is their problem, and Jesus is going to go on to point that out in chapter 23. Humility is teachability.

None of us is so far along that there is not some place in our life, some area where we could benefit from a change of heart, a change of mind, a closer walk with God through Christ, and greater conformity by presenting ourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. It is our reasonable service. So, chapter 23.

Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe

and do, but do not do according to their works, for they say and do not do. For 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.

But all their works they do to be seen by men. He goes on from there. Here is a bit more literal translation, and I offer it, not that there is anything intrinsically wrong with this one, but there is a bit of a question.

We know that these men have created a whole system of tradition on top of the law of Moses, expanding it, extending it to almost ridiculous levels. And so when Jesus says, do what they say, what exactly is he talking about? A more careful translation will help us understand this. So, here is what I would offer you.

You can write this down or you can just kind of emphasize a few things in the verse in your Bible or just think about it. On the seat of Moses sat down the scribes and the Pharisees. This is an heiress.

This happened in the past. The scribes and the Pharisees sat down on Moses' seat. What is Moses' seat? I read all of Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, and I don't remember ever seeing Moses on a chair or on a seat.

So, what is this seat? What does a seat represent? You think about those who sit in the gates for judgment. You think about someone seated on the bama, the judgment platform. This is a place of teaching.

Teachers would seat themselves above their students. Their students would literally sit at their feet to learn. And it is a posture of communication.

You can be the communicator. You can be the communicator. Jesus sat in the boat.

The people would sit on the shore, natural amphitheater, and so on. So, how did Moses come to his position as a communicator of God's truth in Israel? How did this happen? You remember this episode in the first few chapters of Exodus after his birth and early life narrative and slaying the taskmaster, going to Midian. He's a shepherd.

He's been there 40 years or so. What happens? Here is a bush that is burning and it is not consumed. We just talked about this idea of what an extraordinary thing is because fire consumes.

The bush is not consumed. Voice comes from the bush. Take off your shoes.

You're standing on holy ground and so on. This is the occasion at which Moses receives his commission to leadership ultimately to be receiving the law on Mount Sinai and transmitting it to the people of God. Moses is commissioned by God.

He is called by God. Moses doesn't want the job. Remember? Lord, I'm slow of speech

and of a slow tongue.

God said, I will be with your mouth. I tell you, this is a promise. Any careful student of the Word of God, anybody that does what I'm doing right now, hugs to his breast.

Lord, be with my mouth. Teach me what to say, how to say it, how to be effective, how to not get in the way of the message with my own personality, my own ideas and so on. God makes that promise to Moses.

I think there is a principle there that anyone who is called by God to communication, whether it is evangelism, whether it is preaching and teaching, whether it is speaking the truth to one another in love, we look at that promise that God made to Moses and cherish it and find comfort and encouragement in it. Who would dare to try to present the very words of God without such a promise? I will be with your mouth. I will teach you what you should say.

Moses was called to his seat by God. The scribes and the Pharisees were not called to this seat. They have taken it to themselves.

They have elected themselves to sit on Moses' seat. On the seat of Moses, the scribes and Pharisees sat down. We know that there is a theft involved here because if you turn to John chapter 10 verse 1, this is what Jesus himself says.

John chapter 10, Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. These men are usurpers. How do I know this? Jesus says so.

Jesus is about to roundly condemn them in the upcoming verses of this chapter, but you can also tell by their behavior. A God-called man would not abuse the opportunity, would not turn it into a spectacle, into self-centeredness, into seeking glory from men, glorifying each other, a good old boys club, a mutual admiration society. All of these things had taken place amongst the scribes and Pharisees.

Genuinely God-called, God-enabled people don't do this. More about that from the Lord Jesus upcoming. On the seat of Moses sat down the scribes and Pharisees.

All things therefore, whatever they say to you, Jesus continues, do and keep guarding, keep treasuring. But according to their works, it's a different story. All things therefore, whatever they say to you, the word therefore works differently in Greek and in the Aramaic behind it than it does in English.

This is not a conclusion to be drawn. This is a circumstance that pertains. They are speaking the words of Moses.

They have sat down in his seat and when they speak the words of Moses, the therefore

ties the idea back to sitting in Moses' seat. The first thing Moses did when he came down from the mountain was communicate the word of the Lord. So long as they are communicating the truth of God, the words of Moses, whatever they say to you, perform and keep treasuring.

Notice he is the word say, not the word teach. Whatever they say to you, this is saying the words of the law. They're going to read the scrolls.

They've been trained to read and to recite, to quote, to present in the synagogues and in the temple. So when they are saying the words of Moses, treasure those words and do them. This is a present tense and it is an aorist imperative.

These do. An aorist imperative is a start command. If you're in the crowd and remember the Pharisees are still present, but Jesus is no longer talking to them.

He's talking to the crowd, but we know from the, uh, verse 34 and verse 41 of the preceding chapter, the Pharisees are still there and Jesus is talking about them in their presence. He is not talking behind their back. He says they're sitting in Moses' seat.

When they are reading the words of Moses, aorist imperative, you need to do these. You need to perform them. You need to hear those commands and follow them and keep on guarding them.

Start doing them. Keep on treasuring them. That's, it goes from an aorist imperative to a present.

Hear them, do them and continue to treasure them. But according to their works, stop doing, and this is a negative form of the present imperative. And it implies you are following their example of legalism, of doing things for show, of hypocrisy, of loveless adherence to rules and regulations.

And Jesus says, listen to the words of Moses and treasure them. They will lead you to life. Stop doing what the Pharisees do.

They read the words, but they do not do them. This is tragic. So these self-appointed representatives of Moses read the words of Moses, but then they begin to add and put their spin and their accretions and their additions on it.

Keep your finger here and turn back. We did this last time, but I'm going to do it again because it is a powerful indictment. Go back to Matthew chapter 15, verse two, the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus saying, why do your disciples transgress the traditions of the elders? Transgress the traditions of the elders.

Your disciples are not doing them. They do not wash their hands when they eat bread. Find me a place in the law of Moses that says, wash your hands before you eat bread.

It's not in there. This is an expansion, an extension, an interpretation, a man-made teaching. Why do your disciples transgress this? Jesus says in verse three, why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? You accuse my disciples of not following your traditions.

You're transgressing God's commands, the words of Moses. You are breaking to observe your traditions. God commands says, uh, God commanded saying, honor your father and your mother.

And he who curses father or mother, let him be put to death. This is from Exodus and Deuteronomy. But you say, whoever says to his father or mother, whatever profit I might've received, you might've received from me is a gift to God.

It's Corban. I've, I've reserved it. I'm going to bequeath it to the temple.

I'm going to bequeath it to God. So I can't give it to you. So sorry, mom and dad.

And if you're living in squalor, if you can't make ends meet, if you're having a hard time, I've got plenty of resources, but I'm not going to give them to you because I've dedicated my entire estate to God. And after I'm gone and I've ceased enjoying all of the largess and the fancy parties and the fine robes and the sumptuous feasting and impressing my friends, um, the money is going to go to the temple. Therefore he needs not honor his father or mother.

Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition, by your interpretation, by your spin, you have twisted the old Testament scriptures to suit your predilections. It seemeth good to you. You feel like you found a loophole hypocrites.

Well, did Isaiah prophesy about you saying verse eight, Matthew 15, these people draw near to me with their mouth. They honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain, they worship me teaching as doctrines, the commandments of men teaching as doctrines, the commandments, the traditions of men.

That's of course, from Isaiah 29, 13. That's what is happening in our passage. So Jesus tells the people, whatever they tell you, whatever they say, observe and do treasure it.

But according to their works, stop doing for they say and do not do even as they read the words of the law, they are not following them. Now, how would you sum up the law? If asked, let's say you were going to sum it up in like two succinct statements. How would you sum up the words of the law? Love the Lord, your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Love your neighbor as yourself. So if they are saying the words of the law and not doing them, what are they essentially not doing? They do not love God and they do not love one another. You don't have to get all the way down into the details, sum up the law.

They say and do not, according to Jesus. So what are they summarily not doing? They really don't love God. They love themselves and they love their lifestyle.

They love glory for men. They love prominence and so on. And they do not love their brethren whom they are actually oppressing with their traditions.

And Jesus is going to expatiate on this in the upcoming verses. They say and do not do. Verse four, they tie together loads.

They bind, they tie together burdens, hard to bear and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. Our colloquial phrase is they will not lift a finger. They will not lift a finger to move them.

This is really fascinating in Greek. So under these circumstances, these teachers reading the words of Moses, do those words, treasure them. When you hear them, get a hold of that.

There is a concomitant here that you can get good word from a bad source. The Pharisees, despite their evils, can still be useful for reading the word of God. In other words, the Pharisees who are wrongly sitting in Moses' seat, wrongly interpreting, applying and exaggerating and accreting and twisting and turning the word of God, can't diminish its raw power.

So you can get the word of God if it's scrawled on the tiles of the bathroom wall, if it is being read by someone who has got it completely misunderstood. Many times we benefit by listening to bad teachers, false allegations about what scripture means and how it should be interpreted and applied, but at least they're reading the scriptures. Paul makes a similar point when he says, you know, there are people who are preaching the gospel out of all kinds of bad motives, but at least they're preaching the gospel.

The gospel is out there to be discussed. It is being made an issue even by people who have got it wrong. And Paul says, I'm all in favor of the gospel getting out there because a bad source cannot rob it of its power.

This is why another piece of comfort for those who are in a position to study and present is the more content of scripture is in the presentation, it carries its own power. It carries its own authority. The more scripture we look at and the less bloviating and explaining and expositing and illustrating and running off on rabbit trails that the presenter does, the better the message is going to be because you cannot rob the word of God of its power.

Jesus himself says when the Pharisees are reading the scriptures, listen to everything they say, don't miss a word of it, treasure it and follow it. It doesn't matter what they do. In fact, don't do what they do, but do what they say.

So long as they're reading the words of Moses, you can latch onto that. You can bypass the bad intermediate source. You may be getting the words over a bad connection.

You may be listening to a radio or a phone and there's a lot of static and there's a lot of interference. But if you can get those words, don't worry about the radio. Don't worry about the bad connection, get those words and treasure them.

That's where the power is. And when you get them, believe them. Jesus is going to work backward from the Pharisees and not doing what the word says to the cause of that.

Why do they not do what the word says for them to do? What's the problem? Well, as you go back to chapter 16 of Matthew, Jesus is telling his disciples in verse eight, Matthew 16, eight, Oh, you have little faith. Why do you reason among yourselves? Because you have brought no bread. Remember this is after the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000, they're in the boat.

And Jesus says in verse six, take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Now there's bread, but they're leavening it. He doesn't say beware the bread, beware the leaven.

Makes sense. So they think he's talking about, they didn't bring any physical bread in the boat. Jesus says, Oh, you have little faith.

Why do you reason among yourselves? Because you have brought no bread. You're, you're not making the connection here. You're not thinking in spiritual terms.

Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the 5,000 and how many baskets you took up? No, the seven loaves of the 4,000 and how many large baskets you took up? How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And he repeats it, beware of the leaven, what they add to it, what they use to inflate it and to puff it up and to change its nature. Then they understood verse 12, Matthew 16, that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees teaching as doctrine traditions.

Beware, know the difference between bread and leaven. And isn't it amazing that in the power of the Holy Spirit, this is impossible with physical bread. Once bread is leavened, you really can't unleaven it.

But with the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit, we can excise the leaven and enjoy the bread. That bread turns back into manna. It turns into living bread from heaven.

God, the Holy Spirit will give us the discernment and the supernatural power to deleaven bread. Almost any human presentation is going to be flawed because we are flawed.

Somewhere in the preparation, in the presentation, in the reception, in the reflection, we can often get off track.

We misunderstand. We misrepresent. We are all in the process of learning and growing and asking God for greater understanding.

But there will inevitably be some leaven that gets into the bread. The great thing is because we have the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, He will lead us into all truth. And we can, like my dad used to say, even an old cow can nose aside the not useful elements in the hay or in the pasture and find the good grass and eat that.

This is what we do anytime we listen to a Bible class. We can, it may not be very good, but if there's scripture in it and you home in on that scripture, God, the Holy Spirit will multiply that bread in our hearts just as Jesus multiplied the loaves for the 5,000 and the 4,000. The leaven can be removed amazingly so.

And the good, nourishing, strengthening, living power of God's word will be active and present in our hearts, in our thinking, driving our decisions, educating us in terms of our goals, our priorities, and our values. What a tremendous deliverance. This is the ongoing salvation we have.

Jesus saved us at the cross. He continues to save us as the word, capital W, from God, giving it to us day by day, granting to us the presence and power of the Spirit. This is where God's power comes into our life to do things we have no possible way of doing.

So this is cherishing what they say, but not what they teach because they are teaching traditions as doctrines, but they are, they have to start by reading the scroll, latch onto that, treasure that, nose the rest of it aside, and certainly do not follow their example because they say and do not. They don't do it. The words retain their power, but according to their works, stop doing.

You have fallen into revering and respecting and appreciating and glorifying these Pharisees as wonderful representatives of God, and they're not. Do not follow their example. This present imperative, stop following their example, stop doing what they do, has the idea that some action that has begun should stop and remain stopped.

Bring this to a halt and don't start it up again. The scribes and Pharisees were revered. People were following that example, and Jesus says, quit it.

Why should they not follow their example? Because they keep saying and they keep not doing, both present tenses. They keep saying and they don't pay attention to the very words they're communicating. This is convicting.

Again, there's a lot here. If you're a parent teaching your children, if you're a pastor presenting the Word of God, if you're in any sort of an educational setting and you are

saying truth, but you are not living the truth, you're not yourself following the truth, there is a word for this that starts with hippo and ends with crit. And God's Word can survive presentation by a hypocrite, but it is our goal to not be hypocrites.

And Jesus is going to come down with both sandals on the hypocrisy of these scribes and Pharisees in the upcoming chapter. We're about to see that, but three points to remember from our first session this morning. First of all, nothing can rob the Word of God of its power.

When in doubt, when we feel weak, when we feel swept along by forces external or internal, nothing robs the Word of God of its power. The Word of God is alive and powerful. It gets to the very heart, the very center, the focus, the thoughts and intents of the heart are laid open for us to see, for God to see.

It judges the thoughts and intents of our hearts. And that's what we need because we need transformation that starts on the inside. You cannot push any fruit of the Spirit.

You cannot push any element of Jesus' example into people from the outside. It is impossible. You can exhort, you can coerce, you can pressure, you can say anything you want.

You cannot push virtue into human souls from the outside. It has to be created on the inside by God's Word and God's Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is what? The very first one is love.

You can't tell somebody to love. You can supply God's Word. You can emphasize the ministry, the presence and the power of God's Spirit.

You cannot simply talk about love. You can't exhort to love without giving the means. This is the lesson of the law.

By the law comes the knowledge of sin. And we need to recognize our inadequacy, our inability to fulfill the plan and purpose of God, to lay hold of righteousness, to excise sin and evil. We have no power to do that any more than we can unleaven Wonder Bread.

You can't do it. It is not humanly possible. Love and joy and peace are created inside us by God's Holy Spirit who does not take anything from himself.

He takes the words of the Lord Jesus. He takes the words of Scripture. He takes the promises, principles and doctrines from God and creates in us a clean heart.

He renews a right spirit within us. And the things that God is looking for from us are produced from within, not like a creosote treated pole pressurized from without. Well, we have much more to say about this.

The Lord Jesus has much more to say about it. And it is so fascinating. We'll see it when

we come back from our break.