

Matthew 22-01-16b

Let's return to looking at Matthew chapter 23. We are in verse 6, having seen the significance of the motivation that has caused interpretation and application to break down. I was looking at this in the Greek of our passage because there's a happenstance where a lot of Greek words, when you're talking about what they do, they end in usin, O-U-S-I-N, and so there's a repetition in Greek.

I think Jesus probably delivered this in Aramaic, but it's quite fascinating to see this in the original, but I'm not going to digress into it except to say that it's one thing to say, oh, those bad old scribes and Pharisees, look at their hypocrisy. They were doing what they did to be seen by men, and we tend to have an outgoing sense of judgment on, isn't that awful, those terrible rascals, instead of letting the criticism come our direction, search our hearts, and see if in some way, shape, or form this is present in our own hearts. We're all made of the same clay, and I am really on a tear here these recent months because I see so many things that disappoint, that make me sorrowful, that discourage me in looking at what's going on in Christian life, Christian faith, Christian communication around us, and I tend to think, what's the matter with them? I want to argue with them.

I want to correct them. I want to rebuke them. I want to instruct them, and I have made a diligent effort to stop that and to turn my laser-like perception on myself.

Is there someplace where I am doing the same thing? You think about the last half of Romans chapter one. Anybody can suppress the truth in unrighteousness when it's painful, when it's awkward, when it hurts us. I was telling my uncle yesterday, I always enjoy talking to him.

He is a wonderful man of faith and encouragement, and I talk to him about every other week and just see how he's doing, and we were talking about various things, and I mentioned to him that one of the reasons I did not do a master's thesis when I was finishing up at Dallas Seminary, and I did not go on into a doctoral program, and I most definitely did not want to do a doctoral dissertation, is that as soon as you move into the formal expression of ideas in a paper that is going to be filed and published by the school that you're getting your degree from, it's kind of like publishing books or publishing a series of books. How easy would it be for Bart Ehrman to come back from Jesus interrupted or misquoting Jesus? When you've written a book and sold it by the tens or hundreds of thousands, and you've staked out a hill and said, this is my belief, it limits your ability to go in and review and reflect and maybe find that you got something wrong and improve your understanding. I don't want to be stuck that way.

So the reason I mentioned my uncle, he said, well, haven't you been recording Bible classes since the 1990s, and aren't those recordings going to? I said, well, that's like the

men of Sodom that are going to rise up and rebuke me at the judgment because maybe I didn't do as good a job. But I have expressed in the past, and I want to express now, that we all should be learning and growing. And sometimes there is a useful understanding at our stage of growth.

Like when we tell our kids, the sun comes up in the east, and it goes down in the west, and we don't go into rotation and revolution and solar system mechanics and centrifugal versus centripetal and the moon, and we don't tell them all that. We just say, look, the sun comes up, the sun goes down. It's not exactly accurate, but it is a useful understanding in terms of the purpose.

We sleep at night, we get up during the day. God provides light for us. And from sunrise to sunset, there's a lot of wonderful applications such as we saw in Ecclesiastes.

This is what happens to man under the sun. Are we really under the sun? What direction is under relative to what? And so we can learn and grow and mature and improve our understanding. And hopefully there is not so much a complete reversal or deciding that what we learned in the past was wrong, and now we're going to contradict it.

But we build on it, we refine it, we see it in a particular context that then expands. And I say that as an illustration to encourage all of us to not be dogmatic to the point that we can't learn. Dogmatism is good in the sense that we understand the essentials and we will die on that hill.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the one and only Savior. He is the only means to the Father.

He's the way, the truth, and the life. It is his death, his burial, and his resurrection that are central to our faith. They are literal.

He was real. His ascension into heaven was real. He is coming back for literal kingdoms.

You can find many of these things expressed, I hope, succinctly in the doctrinal or theological section of our church website. But there are essentials for which we will go to the mat. But to be teachable is another way of saying to be humble.

We have to be convictable if we're something wrong. What I see in a lot of the current winds that are blowing many rudderless ships in the Christian world today is a lack of humility to stop and consider and really reflect on a different point of view. I find many things problematic with the progressive and deconstructing movement, but their criticisms of failures and flaws in many traditional churches is valid, and it's real, and it has caused genuine pain, genuine reaction to the point that some have been caused to stumble and question or even disavow their faith.

And that is the church's fault. There should be nothing in church function that causes

someone to question whether the Bible is true. Seriously? I, as a Christian, have managed to plant ideas in your head that drive a wedge between you and the God of Scripture.

That's serious, and there will be consequences, personal and beyond, for that. We need to be humble. We need to be teachable.

We need to be able to accept criticism. Can you imagine what would have happened if the scribes and Pharisees listening to Jesus on this Tuesday before the Thursday on which he was crucified had taken his words to heart, had stopped and thought, Am I really this phylactery-broadening, tassel-wearing, glory-seeking hypocrite that he is describing? Is this really me? What is God in heaven going to think about that? Could I recognize the Messiah if he came, if I am all about myself, if I'm so absorbed in mutual admiration, society, fellowship with my other Pharisees and scribe friends? Wouldn't it have been great? This is the best, truest teaching delivered by the best, truest teacher ever. The problem is not with the truth, is it? The problem is with the attitude with which the truth is heard and the consequent interpretation.

The only way we're going to get the interpretation right is to be humble, to be asking and seeking and knocking, and to be submissive to the word and the will of God. If it doesn't make sense to us, we don't question the word, we question ourselves. What's the matter with me that I'm having trouble with the word of God? Is someone else misinterpreting it and turning it into a burden that is too hard for me to bear? What does Jesus say about burdens? You have a memory verse, come to me all ye who labor and are what? Heavy laden.

What is Jesus going to do if you come to him? I will give you rest. I am meek and humble, lowly of heart. My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

When we come away from exposure to the word of God, someone sitting in Moses' seat or sitting in Paul's seat or sitting in Jesus' seat and communicating those words of truth, the result should be an easy yoke and a light burden, right? If we find ourselves now cultivating humility and offloading the old man with his arrogance and his self-centeredness and his pride, that is a real struggle. Where do we get the power to do that? Can I put off my old man with his desires and coveting and lust for power and glory and influence and adulation and the rest of it? Do I have the power to put that off? Can I just decide to be a great guy and love God and love one another? Does any of us have that power? There is an argument being made today that we do. It's you were made in the image of God and you never lost it.

We did not get corrupted when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden. We still have, and they love to use the Latin phrase, *imago Dei*, image of God. And so people will appeal to the *imago Dei* to say, well, I'm in the image of God.

I'm going to claim the promises in the upper room in John 14, where Jesus said, I will send you another comforter, the Holy Spirit. He will lead you into all truth. Well, I have the Holy Spirit and he's leading me into all truth.

So whatever I think is on a par with scripture. I heard a fascinating analysis, and I'm going to get back in our passage momentarily, but I heard a fascinating analysis of the last few decades of cultural shift in this country, opining that in the nineties, after the turbulence of the seventies and so on, everyone was suddenly encouraged to have their own truth. It's the genesis and the expression of post-modernism.

It doesn't have to make sense. It doesn't have to be rooted in experience or tradition or common understanding. I will find my own truth.

I will define myself. Remember in the eighties, everybody, and even the seventies had to go look off somewhere and find themselves. Well, in the nineties, people found themselves and pretty much decided I will define myself.

I will choose my destiny. I will choose my goals, my values, my priorities. I will do it all myself.

And what this essentially did was make each of us our own God. These are God's prerogatives to give us value, to communicate purpose and meaning and definition. Who am I? Why am I here? Believers have always looked to God, Old Testament and new.

Who am I? I'm a child of God. Why am I here? God has a purpose. God has a plan.

As I enter into his thinking, his plans and purposes, I find fulfillment because I know who I am and I know why I'm here. With the rejection of the biblical view and the biblical truth about this, that only in God through Christ can we find the answers to those questions. In the nineties, they said, no, we're going to leave churches and Christianity behind and we're going to do these things for ourselves.

I thought this was a very insightful observation. The fellow talking said, what happened was people found this was a burden too heavy to bear. We do not have creator power.

We do not have the wisdom and the insight and the comprehensive understanding to define ourselves or establish our purpose. People began to be crushed under the weight of this burden. You see my tie here to our passage, crushed under the weight of the burden because I have defined myself and I've chosen my path and my purpose and my identity and my associations.

I'm defined by my race. I'm defined by my gender. I'm defined by my vocation.

I'm defined by my hobby. I have decided all this for myself. It was hollow and completely unfulfilling and powerless.

Hollow, unfulfilling, powerless. With that realization, the suggestion came in, well, I need something bigger than myself to do this job. I'm inadequate.

And this wasn't necessarily a conscious thought process, but psychologically and philosophically, this is what happened. People began to look outward to find this. We know that you can only find this in God through Christ.

There is no other way to be enabled and empowered to know who we are and why we're here, to be enabled and empowered to love God and to love one another than by God's grace through his provision of power. Righteousness, worth, value can only come by faith. Righteousness is laid hold of by faith.

I cannot be valuable. I cannot be righteous unless I recognize God's value that was placed on me by spending the precious blood of Christ on my behalf. That is the only source.

Well, people tried to do that themselves, failed en masse. And so there is a very cogent observation by a famous author that says, if you can't conscience God and you don't believe in God, you've got to go to the next biggest thing for your answers and your power, and that is government. If God doesn't fit into your thinking, you're going to look for the next biggest thing.

And the next biggest thing is government. This is why people want laws to be passed and ordinances to be passed that recognize them as special, that recognize them as meaningful, that give them opportunities to do whatever they want to do. This is valid because the government says so.

And the government is forcing everyone else to acknowledge me and the pronouns I choose, the direction I choose, the lifestyle I choose, the vocation I choose, the sexual preferences that I choose. I want that validated and encoded in law. Doesn't this make sense? Doesn't it explain a lot of what we've seen over the last few decades? Well, this has now crept into the church and with faulty interpretation of the scriptures, faulty application of the scriptures leading to failure, abuse, and hollow practice, hollow Christianity, hollow spirituality.

People inside the church, and as I have told you a few times now, the progressive movement does not recruit from the mission field of unbelievers. They co-opt and recruit from within. How do they do that? How could you co-opt and recruit believers away from confidence in the scriptures as the inspired word of God? How can you recruit and co-opt believers away from the essential nature of Jesus' work on the cross? How can you deceive people into looking elsewhere for validation by masquerading as an angel of light, by creating a group, a federation of people on social media who will affirm you in man-made love, who create their own form of approbation, and it is reactive.

It is built on a rejection and a separation from valid things, and it is a universe of your own making. We're just all about love. We don't need the cross.

We don't need to break the power of canceled sin. We're not prisoners who need to be set free. You remember the great hymn, O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing, My Great Redeemer's Praise, and you get down to the verse in there that talks about He breaks the power of canceled sin.

He sets the prisoner free and the power of His blood, and His blood can make the foulest clean. His blood avails for me. The power to love only comes into our lives after the power of sin is broken.

When you disavow that there's a sin problem, therefore you disavow the atoning work of Christ on the cross. This is what progressive Christianity is. We're just going to jump to love.

I say that to say this. Look at Matthew 23, verse 6. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplace, and to be called by men, Rabbi. They love to be loved.

You see the connection here? They love to be loved. Look, there's Rabbi Abihu. Abihu.

Hello, Rabbi. Rabbi, can you come to our table this evening? We'll give you the best seat in the house. This, as you remember from our upper room studies, the best seat was at the head of the table to the left because you're leaning on your left elbow, eating with your right hand, and at the left of the end of the table, you can see the entire table without having to turn your head.

Anywhere else, especially on the right side of the table as you sit at the head, those to your right, if you imagine them reclining on their left elbow to see someone at the head of the table, they have to crane their neck. If you're on the left side of the table and you're reclining on your left elbow, you've got to look over your right shoulder to see the people at the head of table. But if you're sitting at the head, you can see everybody on both sides.

You can monitor, you can hear, you can judge, you can respond. It's the best seat. So this is a desire to gain the approval of people.

It is argued by those who are espousing the Jesus hermeneutic and the kingdom love principle, the enemy love principle that the first few centuries of the church, the Christians were just so loving that people couldn't resist. And they came to the faith because of the love, the self-sacrificial love, love that was willing to endure a wrong and not respond to the enemy love that they had. This just won people over in droves.

And that's how Christianity got started. Hear me carefully. If you don't get anything out

of the lessons this morning, hear this.

When you hear people pleading enemy love, the golden rule, even the summary of the old Testament law that Jesus and the scribe agreed on in Mark chapter 12, and people say, this is the definition of Christianity is to love and be loved, run, run away. That is not Christianity. Do you know what drew people to Christian faith ever since the cross, ever since Pentecost? It isn't the love of Jesus followers.

It is faith in Jesus saving work on the cross. People come to the cross, not because they don't have enough love. It's because we don't have enough power to escape slavery, to sin, corruption, fallenness.

We know what we're like. The Holy spirit does not come and convict the world of a lack of love. What are the issues according to God's word, sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Jesus' work on the cross doesn't help us understand love better. Is love involved? Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. That is all true.

But where the interpretation goes awry, where it goes astray is the very same place it goes astray for these scribes and Pharisees. I, as a former evangelical, fundamentalist, conservative Bible church going person, suffered wrongs at the hands of my fellow believers. I didn't ever understand the teaching of the Old Testament.

I don't know why God was so mad and so angry. And there's so much harshness in the Bible. I don't understand.

Nobody explained it to me. It makes me feel bad. And so rather than pursue humility, understanding, I know whom I have believed and I trust that he is able to keep what I have committed to him.

You have to start fundamentally believing that God is a good and loving heavenly father or in the Old Testament, he's a monstrous volcano God. It starts with motivation of the heart. Are you looking to understand God and you're puzzled? Lord, I don't understand why the suffering continues.

I don't understand why you allow evil in the world. I don't understand these harsh policies that you gave to a specific generation at a specific time in a specific circumstance to perpetrate judgment on the Canaanites. If I haven't said this before, I'm saying it now.

If I have said it before, I'm going to say it again. When you read the Old Testament scriptures and God warns his people over and over again, if you depart from this covenant, if you disregard my law and my presence and my definition and purpose for you as my people, if you owe Israel disregard that you are my people, you are the ones I have chosen to be in relationship with and in whom I am going to establish my presence.

If you reject that and disregard it, judgment is going to come on you like unto the judgment on the Canaanites.

And in case you're in danger of mythologizing or forgetting what that judgment was like, I am going to use you to execute that judgment so that you see it at firsthand. Little different than the ritual sacrifices, the sacrifices that required the best animal in the flock to be brought before God and slain by the offerer, the blood to flow, the life to be expended, the waste and the slaughter and the sacrifice of this animal. Why did God have them do that? Why didn't he just give them a book of fables or fairy tales and aphorisms that had a pithy point? He made them come down and watch as animals were slain and blood is everywhere.

And the same thing happens in the judgment on Canaan. It's a one generation affair. God doesn't encode in the law from generation under generation, you will go forth and find somebody and slaughter and kill them to the last man, child, baby, animal, all of their stuff is bringing all the loot into the temple.

He did this once, once. And he made an issue out of the iniquity of the Amorites and he involved the children of Israel in that judgment. God could have simply caused their hearts to all quit beating men, women, and children, and so on.

He used his own people in that judgment to warn them to graphically illustrate for them. This is what happens to the generations of those who hate me. He brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey and prospered their crops and their flocks and their herds and their businesses to impress upon them.

This is an example of blessing and relationship and opportunity to shine the light of God to the Gentiles, to be a blessing and a light to all nations. This is what you can do. People will be drawn to the light and you can say, I didn't earn this wealth myself.

Remember, we just read this in Deuteronomy. Don't think that you earned this wealth on your own. I am giving it to you as a sign.

It is for a purpose. Same thing with the judgment. Well, you miss all of that.

You throw it out and you say, the scriptures must be wrong. My understanding can't be wrong. My ethical sense can't be wrong that there is both a time to scatter and a time to build up.

There's a time to wound and there's a time to heal. There's a time to reap and there's a time to sow. There's a time for war and there's a time for peace.

I think there's only a time for peace. There is never a time for war. Instead of seeking and understanding from God, we become the 90s generation where I will be God.

I will decide. I will lift my throne above the stars of God. I will be like the most high.

I can do the God job. And we get crushed under the weight of that burden. And the people who were being led down this same path away from the righteousness of God, away from having a heart that would instinctively fulfill the law, instead of legalistically shouldering the burden of regulations.

How far can I walk? And how much can I wash? And when can I cook? And all of these strictures and expansions and accretions on the law becoming this heavy load that no one can bear. Instead of the relationship with God being a source of life, a source of strength, you don't get crushed under a burden. You mount up with wings as eagles.

You don't stagger under a heavy load. You walk and you run and you're not weary, and you walk and you're not faint. The word of God, the truth of God, and the spirit of God are power.

It's not burdensome. Jesus sums this up with the passages I quoted earlier out of John. So that's what is at issue here two days before the crucifixion.

They love to be loved. They love to love each other. They love to call each other rabbi and to be called rabbi.

And by instigating this system of mutual admiration, they have missed the important things of the law. Look at what he says. They love these greeting places.

They love to be called by men rabbi. This is why I don't like any title in front of my name. It scares me.

And look at what Jesus says. We don't need to be Dr. This or Reverend that. Reverend just makes me actually want to physically run out of the room.

Do not be called rabbi. Why? One is your teacher. Do not be called the guy running the class.

Rabbi, you've got one teacher. Now, if you didn't read the rest of the verse, how would you expect it to end? If I was writing this, if you were writing it, what would we say? Don't be called rabbi. You have one teacher and you are all students.

You are all pupils. You are all disciples. Isn't that how we would typically finish the sentence? How does Jesus finish the sentence? You have one teacher and you are all brethren.

He says, if you're going to look at others, don't look at them as somebody to impress, as somebody to try to gain approval from or adulation from or glory from. You have one teacher. And when you look at each other, we're all brothers.

We're all at the same level at the feet of the one teacher. He doesn't redirect attention to himself and he says, I'm the only big dog in this pack. He says, you've got one teacher.

You're brethren. You should look at each other as brethren, as equals. In the spiritual sense, verse nine, do not call anyone on earth your father.

Now, obviously we all have fathers and dads and so on. There are people who are given an honorific because they've done worthy work. R.C. Buckner, who founded the orphanage in Dallas over a hundred years ago, was affectionately known as Father Buckner because he, in a sense, adopted hundreds and hundreds of children who came to that orphanage and he had fatherly care and concern for them and he fought for them and he worked to gain better conditions for them and better opportunities for them.

And he's called Father Buckner. There's nothing wrong with that. What is Jesus talking about here? Everybody who puts on a priest frock is going to be Father Bob and Father Tom and Father Joe.

And it's an honorific that is designed to have an empty recognition of a superior class. This is the very unfortunate distinction that has been made between clergy and lay people. How can you read this passage with any understanding or comprehension at all and decide that, well, there's the clergy and there's the laity.

There's the high mucky mucks, doctor this, father that, rabbi this, you know, rambam that, and not. We're all brothers. We're walking the same earth at exactly the same level.

We are brothers and sisters in Christ. None of us has been promoted to parenthood or to dictatorship or to a wrong kind of leadership. We all speak the truth to each other in love.

There is no higher and lower ground. Do not call anyone on earth your father. One is your father.

He who is in heaven. Do not be called teachers. Now notice in verse eight, do not be called rabbi.

If someone tries to elevate you for whatever reason, it may be well-intentioned. It may be, you know, sycophantic, shining one on, flattery or something. Don't let anyone call you rabbi, Jesus says.

Do not be called. You stop others from calling you this. In verse nine, do not call others.

Don't be the recipient and don't be the initiator of these flattering titles. Don't deal in titles and appearances. Deal in reality.

The reality is we've got one teacher. That's God in heaven. So don't misassign someone

else as some sort of worthy intermediary that is sitting in God's seat, as it were.

Remember who's really in charge. It's the one in heaven. So don't be called that.

Don't let someone maneuver you into that position and don't maneuver others into that position. That's verses nine and 10. Verse 11, he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.

Anyone who lets themselves be elevated, anyone who elevates someone falsely, that elevation is going to come crashing down. You elevate yourself into the position of God and try to define yourself and give yourself purpose and meaning and definition, it's going to come crashing down. It'll come crashing down of its own weight.

But in the body of believers, there is going to be divine judgment. The first shall be last. We're told this so many times.

The elder will serve the younger. Verse 12, whoever exalts himself will be humbled. Keep in mind now, this is not just is the term used, is the label applied.

It is, is this a part of some sort of false exaltation, a false elevation? Whoever exalts himself will be humbled. He who humbles himself will be exalted. Why? Humility is teachability.

If these Pharisees and scribes that were listening had listened to what Jesus said and humbled themselves, wouldn't it have been great to look over and see a Pharisee listening to Jesus, see a look of conviction and being cut to the heart come over his face and he starts unstrapping this phylactery. They even had regulations on the kind of knot that should be tied in. It reminds me of the sword knot on a Marine Corps officer's Mameluke.

There's only one way you can tie that knot, and it's right. Well, they had all kinds of, you know, how many wraps, how many times do you wrap the strap around? What kind of knot do you tie in it? All of this flimflammy. Wouldn't it have been great if Jesus could have looked over and seen any of the scribes or Pharisees being cut to the quick, looking down, realizing the problem, unstrapping that stuff, taking it off, throw it on the ground.

We need to be those people. That needs to be we. That needs to be us to be humble.

The humble will be exalted. If there's any exaltation to me, exaltation is opportunity. When you gain more authority and you're overseeing more in a school, if you're a good teacher and you're a good educator, you can implement policies on a grander scale than just your own classroom.

I had this experience at the artillery school. Started out as a classroom instructor. I can affect one group of lieutenants, but as I was there longer and became a part of the

structure, I was able to rewrite field manuals and implement new doctrines and incorporate new technologies and be a part of that that affected all artillery in the Marine Corps and in the U.S. Army worldwide, and by extension, even foreign armies and artillerymen.

And what a wonderful privilege. But you want to be sure that you're doing it right if you rise to that level of influence, because if you're doing it wrong, you're corrupting to the same level of potential that you had to bless. So the humble, the teachable, those who are impressionable and will respond to the word of God, when they are exalted, they have the opportunity to spread the presence and the power, the blessing of God in a wider arena.

That's what it means to be exalted. Then in verse 13, he's going to begin the woes, and we'll start there next time. This is enough sticks for us to work on, isn't it? This is enough truth to look into the chambers of our own hearts and try to purge by God's power what needs purging, to cultivate by God's power what needs cultivating.

And we're going to see examples in each of these woes. I told you there were seven, but now I realize there are only six, and we'll see why next time. But what a wonderful privilege to have God's word and God's spirit.

And all we have to be is teachable, willing to change our minds, to examine what we take for granted, to avoid dogma and seek wisdom. We'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, we do thank you for your grace, your patience with us.

We are sometimes so slow to learn and to recognize, but given such clear pictures and such wonderful communication from your son, our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that your Holy Spirit will illuminate our hearts, help us to grow, to be useful as servants, to genuinely love you and love one another in the time that remains to us in this life. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.