

Matthew 22-01-30a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 30th day of January, 2022. We're continuing our study in the Gospel of Matthew.

We're in chapter 23 and we are looking today at the woes that Jesus pronounces in the direction of the scribes and Pharisees. I think I said last time that there are there's one less than the traditional listing here and we'll take a look at that. There are going to be a total of seven.

If you count them in Matthew, you'll see eight, but one of them does not belong. And it's kind of important to not shoehorn it in there for reasons that we will see. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our investigation into these seven woes and we'll get started.

Father, we're so grateful for this time of fellowship. We thank you for each one who has set aside time to join us and to contribute their enthusiasm and their presence, their comments, their prayers, their spiritual gifts to our fellowship for the upbuilding of the assembled group. We thank you for this opportunity to spend time looking at your word and being encouraged and educated by your Holy Spirit.

We pray that our time of study this morning will contribute to those goals so that we can truly develop and enhance our love for you and our love for one another. We pray it in Jesus name. Amen.

Let's take a look at our passage. We've been through the first portion of this chapter a couple of times and the instruction that Jesus gives to his own disciples with regard to their behavior toward each other and toward those who are outside. Don't let anyone call you rabbi.

Do not call anyone teacher. And there is a tendency to think that this is an encouragement toward equality, that we should view everyone the same, but there is a caution in that regard. There are those who are remarkable, those who are of note, those whose example is worthy of emulation as they say on the award certificates you get sometimes in the military.

So we tend to think when Jesus says don't let anyone call you rabbi or reverend or don't call anyone teacher that we are being encouraged to view everyone the same, everyone alike, but that's actually not the case. Instead, it is the basis upon which someone is exalted or the basis on which someone is to be of light esteem. It is God's standard.

It is God's requirements that are in view rather than those of man. And Jesus has explained that in great detail. When you love to be the object of approval and

approbation and respect and adulation and so on, and you encourage people to recognize you with titles and you stretch your stuff out in public, this was the behavior for which the scribes and Pharisees were called out by the Lord Jesus.

And he encourages his disciples don't be that way. But keep in mind that as he concludes that section, he says in verse 12, whoever exalts himself will be humbled. He who humbles himself will be exalted.

If you think about that for just a moment, does that mean that everyone is going to be viewed the same? What it means is people aren't going to necessarily be viewed the way they want to be viewed. They are going to be sorted and assembled and have degrees of altitude based on God's evaluation. The humble are going to be exalted by God.

If they're exalted, they are higher. If those who try to exalt themselves are abased, they are going to be lower. And it is a mistake to think that God is the great leveler and that Christianity is an encouragement to think of everyone the same and to make no distinctions.

We are cautioned not to judge, but we are to discern. You can read the 16th chapter of Romans where Paul gives an encouragement to the recipients of his letter to note people who have spiritual qualities that are worthy of respect and of association and of paying attention to in terms of follow the example of these people. Paul says several times, follow my example.

And we're not all the same and you can't just shoot love out of a scattergun and make no distinction and no discernment. So it is not an encouragement to equality, it is an encouragement to God's evaluation. So we pick up now this morning in chapter 23 of Matthew at verse 13, having just said, whoever exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Verse 13 says, but woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. That is woe number one. Verse 14 is not in the gospel of just cross it out.

This was imported from Mark chapter 12 and Luke chapter 20, where it is a part of Jesus warning to the people about the scribes and Pharisees, but it isn't addressed directly to them. It's more of a third person idea in those gospels. It's been imported and a second personalized here.

Verse 14 is just not there. So skip it. We pick up in verse 15 with the second woe, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you travel land and sea to win one proselyte.

And when he is one, you make him twice as much the son of hell as yourselves. The third is in verse 16, woe to you, blind guides who say, whoever swears by the temple, it is

nothing and so on. We're going to concentrate in this session on the first two woes in verse 13 and verse 15, because this really sets the tone and establishes the pattern that Jesus is going to follow all the way through the end of this chapter.

So, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. These are the two categories that he specifically calls out. Why? What is the job of the scribes? They are the scholars, the custodians of the written law.

That's why they are called scribes. They are the custodians. They are the ones to ensure that when the law is read, when it is expounded, when it is communicated, that that is done accurately.

They are in essence, the Bible teachers. This was a function that developed as the Old Testament writings became a canon, became a collection, and someone needed to care for them, to be in charge of them. It's not in the law of Moses.

God did not at Mount Sinai say, and behold, one of the sons of Aaron is going to do nothing, but watch out for the manuscript. There is a criticism around, and it has been around for some time, that those who concentrate on the written text are bibliolaters, worshiping a book instead of a person, and so on. If that happens, it should be called out and corrected.

That is not the case if you are a Bible church and you are gleaning from the text the word of God. The word of God is not the ink on the page. It is the truths, the promises, the principles, the doctrines that are contained therein.

It is an easy criticism and something of a cheap shot and a hollow charge to say that a church such as ours that has Bible in its name is somehow missing relationship with the Lord Jesus and or God the Father and or the Holy Spirit because we look to the word of God for our information, for our instruction, for the things that we place our faith in and aim our faith at. We have talked many times my standard favorite analogy that when you are talking to someone on the phone that is at a great distance, the phone is essential. If you want to talk to them in near real time, you pretty much need a phone or a radio to do that.

You need a device that can take what is very distant and bring it near and have immediacy and have communication. If you do not have your Bible, how do you expect God to speak? If you want to have the Jesus hermeneutic and you want to have the ability to love God and love one another, those essential distillations are of the law that God told Moses to write down. He said the king in Israel, once the monarchy would be established, was to make his own copy of the law.

The text is important. It certainly needs to be kept in its place. A Bible is not a lucky charm.

I think it is perhaps easier for us to recognize because we are a couple of steps distant from the spoken word of God as it was delivered to prophets, the words of Jesus as they fell on the ears of his disciples who would become apostles, and then those individuals writing it down in Hebrew or in Greek, and then the translation from Hebrew and Greek into our language, we realize that despite our best efforts, those layers of handoff are a little bit of the telephone game where you sit in a circle and you whisper something in the right ear of a person sitting at one end and he whispers it in turn and it passes down to the chair at the opposite end of the line, and then you ask that person what's the message. Every handoff has the potential for a miscommunication or something that is misheard and misunderstood. We know this, and so we're not subject in most cases to the kind of idolatry of the text that is being charged.

You do have your King James only people who believe that the 1611 King James has the same level of inspiration as the tablets Moses carried down from the mountain and the early copies of the prophets and so on. We don't really have that problem, but keep in mind when you're looking at the scribes, there is a danger if your identity is scribe. I am associated with the text.

I have unique access and therefore insight into these scrolls, and to walk around as scribe capital S is a danger. I don't think this is something that so much needs to be preached from pulpits as, you know, shame on you fellow believers if you're making an idol out of your Bible. I don't think most of us have that problem.

The problem is if you become an academician, if you become a theologian, if you become someone who gains a great deal of expertise in dealing with the text, that you can begin to think of yourself as a textual scholar and start down this road. And the problem is if you wed yourself to the text and then you decide, like Bart Ehrman as we've seen in years past, that there's something wrong with the text, well your faith falls with the text. In reality, there are problems.

There are many problems. If you remember when we went through 1 Samuel, that is the most vexed collection of letters in the whole Bible trying to straighten out what was being said. The text has problems.

People can decide that there are contradictions and so on. So when Jesus says, woe to you scribes because you've got problems, he's not saying don't be a scribe. He's saying don't invest your identity in being a text expert, in being a theologian or a some sort of specialist in the word.

I like to think of people who work in the earth. You've got shovels. You've got picks.

You've got pickmatics. You've got posthole diggers. If you're working for a larger organization and you've got cat equipment and you've got bulldozers and backhoes and things, ditch witches, what I like to call a dirt chainsaw, that's great.

But you don't walk around saying I'm a shovel expert. I'm a pickmatic expert. Look at how well I can use this device or this tool.

The work is the measure. And there's an old saw that says bad workmen are the first to blame their tools. You know, if I just had better tools, I could do a better job.

The real problem is in the work ethic, in the knowledge and experience, in the dedication that someone who wields tools has. If you become defined by your tools instead of defined by the work that you are called to do, this is who Jesus is talking to here. We have value because we are related to God in our day through Jesus Christ.

That's what defines us. That's what makes us who we are. And everyone has value in God's eyes.

The extent to which God can recognize and approve and bless and use us is really up to us. What kind of a workman are we? Are we a workman that needeth not to be ashamed because we are rightly dividing the word of truth, the issue being the word? Or are we defining ourselves by how many tools? And I will tell you something that I am personally guilty of. I own way too many guitars for my level of skill playing the guitar.

And I have visited nobody in present company, and I mean that sincerely, but I was tuning a piano for a guy who plays about like I do. And he's got an entire music room with a mixer and electronic amps and equipment. And he's got a beautiful collection of guitars.

It looks like Guitar Center in his home. And he's retired and has got the wherewithal to do it. But I asked him to play something for me, and he said, you need to play this guitar.

It's a really great one. And it was. And we had really wonderful fellowship.

And I'm not picking on him, but it did make me think you can't become a better guitarist by buying a lot of guitar books. You can't become a better guitarist by watching really great people play the guitar. And you can't become a better guitarist by assembling a beautiful collection of guitars.

There are people who are in present company who should have many guitars because they make them sing opera. And when you can do that, that's when you can take those tools and you can make beautiful music with them. But the skill is in the heart.

The skill is in the fingers. The skill is in the experience and in the expression. It's in the person, not in the tools.

So when he says, woe to you, scribes, why are you defining yourself by your contact with the text? There have been Bible churches who said, well, we're better than a denominational church because we're in closer contact with the text. When that

happens, whoa, literally, whoa. We are not better Christians because we've got Bibles, because we take notes, because we look behind the text and dig a little deeper.

That doesn't make us better people. These are tools and this is work. What is the quality of the work? Are we transformed by the renewing of our minds? Are we headed for the kingdom and to be exalted in that kingdom? That should be our goal.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be skillful enough and experienced enough to be of use to the master, to be a workman who does not need to be ashamed. And therefore you get the contract, you get the work and the work is satisfying and it's enjoyable. And it is an offering that you can present to the Lord and say, thank you for teaching my hands to war and my fingers to fight.

Thank you for teaching me in the spiritual conflict to succeed and to advance and to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus and to shine a light in darkness. Nothing wrong with that ambition, but we have to separate how it is done from why it is done and for whom it is done and in what spirit it is done. The scribes failed that test and Jesus calls them out and he does it.

It is scary the intensity with which Jesus speaks here because he doesn't do this in anger. He doesn't do it with emotion or passion. His quiet on target condemnation is just deadly.

He is deadly serious and he is calling out these errors. And anyone who had an ear to hear is probably going to be those minority in these groups who did change their mind and did come to faith because when Jesus identified the hypocrisy and the hollowness and the shallowness, they knew it. They were cut to the quick serves.

What must we do? And there were some in this group that responded to this, but it takes humility. We have to be willing to convert our thinking to take a hard look at ourselves and say, you know, I'm really, I'm, I'm in a way practicing identity politics. I'm sort of playing the card of my identity, uh, as a Bible church member, so to speak, instead of here is the, here is the workmanship that I'm using these tools to achieve.

So this first woe, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, there is distance between your outward appearance and your heart, the way you appear, the front that you put forward and the actuality and the reality of what is going on inside. There should be no distance when we are successful in our life of faith and our, uh, quest to lay hold of righteousness by that faith. It ought to be at the very core of our being and express its way out.

If it's not there, we can't always just decide to have it. We need to practice. We need to dedicate time to thinking about the word of God and cultivating the spirit in his presence and power so that the inner life works its way out.

And we are not hypocrites. Hypocrisy is called out so often in the Bible. If you have access to a Thompson chain reference Bible, look up the topic of false religion.

It takes up it's it's, if you've got a Thompson, the topics are numbered and this is topic 29, 88, 29, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98. It takes up two full pages of tiny type of nothing but references old Testament and new to God's hatred of false religion, false profession, false faith. It is, it is the probably the most condemned behavior in the Bible.

Well, that's where Jesus starts. What do you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men. You neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

Now, let me ask you a question. It's like a pop quiz. What is the first? Whoa.

What is Jesus issue with these hypocritical scribes and Pharisees? We've already covered the Pharisees. I'm giving that a light touch because we talked about them in detail in contrast to the Sadducees. We know that they were prided themselves on their expertise and on their following the finest details of the law.

Jesus is going to get to the spices and so on about them, but they're, they're all about the minutia and both knowing doing and judging others on the standard of the minutia of the law, all about the externalities, the external appearance and paying no attention to the inside, which is very simply judged by the standard. How much do you love God? And how much do you love one another? How much do you love your neighbor? If it's all your heart, all your soul, all your strength and all your mind toward God. And if you treat others the way you would like to be treated as yourself, love your neighbor as yourself, the golden rule do unto others.

That's the measure of what's on the inside. You don't need 613 separate commandments of the law to judge what's going on on the inside. What is love? But here, this first issue that is called out is what, what is the sin? What is the crime? It's first on the list.

It's the issue of the kingdom of God. You shut up the kingdom. Some translations say you are locking the kingdom.

You've locked it from the outside. You're not going in and you're not letting anyone else enter the kingdom. So in your notes or in the margin of your Bible or circle the words, this issue is about entering the kingdom, failing to enter and making it impossible for others to enter.

Now, how can they do this? How can they stop people from entering the kingdom? Well, this brings us to a very wonderful topic. How do you enter the kingdom? What does Jesus have to say about entering the kingdom? So for your pop quiz, what is the first passage of scripture that comes to your mind when the issue is enter the kingdom? What would

you say? You get the camel in the eye of the needle. Um, what is the single Bible verse everybody in the world knows a little earlier sent right book, but eight, eight chapters earlier than, than Lazarus close.

Who came to Jesus by night? And what is the issue in that conversation? Except a man be born again. He cannot see the kingdom of God unless you are born of water and the spirit. You cannot enter the kingdom.

John chapter three, right? These are the passages we want to focus on because this is what the Pharisees and the scribes are preventing being born of water. That's physical birth born of the spirit. This comes by faith in God.

Interestingly, not by prayer. We don't pray to ask Jesus to come into our heart. That's nowhere in scripture.

I don't know. Revelation three 20 completely turned on its head and misapplied is where that came from, but entering the kingdom. So let's kind of start at the beginning because we've seen that here in Matthew flip back, keep your place in a 23 and go back to Matthew chapter five.

What is Matthew chapter five? The B attitudes. This is the beginning of the teaching on the Hill, the sermon on the Mount, right? We're looking at seven woes. You remember in Matthew five, we had the nine blessed are there's nine blessed statements here by Jesus.

What's verse three, Matthew five, three blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. How can you possess? And by the way, if you've got possession in the kingdom, you pretty much need access, right? It's if your money is in the bank and they locked the bank, uh, you can't get your money. It may be there on paper, but you need access.

So there's is the kingdom. These people are going to enter the kingdom and they are going to find that they have ownership and possession in the kingdom. So poor in spirit, how would we translate this into modern colloquial American humility, teachability, blessed are those who know they have a need.

When I look at my spirit and I say poverty, I am poor. What do the poor need? What did the poor need? They need more than what they've got, right? You, you can be, uh, you can, you can be poor in energy. You can have a poverty of, of get up and go.

You can have poverty of opportunity. You can have poverty of, uh, resources. You can have poverty in a lot of different ways.

And what you need is, is evident poor. So poor in spirit is recognizing that I have spiritual need. Blessed are those who recognize their spiritual need.

Why that is a condition of entrance and possession in the kingdom. Look at verse 10, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. I will pursue the righteousness that comes only from God, whatever it costs.

It may cost me good opinion. It may cost me opportunities. It may cost me, uh, opposition and antagonism on the part of people.

But righteousness is more important than what people can give me. And even if they not only disregard me, but actively oppose me and persecute me, righteousness is my priority. Righteousness is at the top of the list.

God's righteousness, which comes only by faith. I am poor in spirit. I need God's righteousness.

I will pursue that righteousness, whatever the cost and it will cost. Jesus said, I'm not coming to bring peace. It's a sword and it's going to divide people because some people are going to pay that cost and others are going to oppose it, disregard it, scorn it, redefine it, re-imagine it, rethink it.

Scribes and Pharisees are preventing people from identifying and recognizing spiritual poverty and identifying and recognizing how to be filled. All of these intermediate verses between verse three and verse 10 are about the kingdom. Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.

This comfort is, is comfort in the present based on hope of the future. Many times there is no vindication. There is no, uh, reset.

There is no do-over. There is no recompense in this life, which is why Paul says in Corinthians, if this life only we have hope in Christ, we're of all men, most miserable, this comfort and this encouragement are based on resolution ultimately in a future kingdom. And the hope and the confidence gives us a foretaste of these things in the present.

It was true for Israel looking at the millennial kingdom. It is true for us looking at the kingdom of the son and the kingdom of the father. The entrance criteria are the same.

There is no difference. There is no distance. If you are not qualified for the kingdom of the son, you are not qualified for the kingdom of the father and vice versa.

Everything Jesus says about the kingdom to Israel, the literal future millennial kingdom for them, it all applies equally to us looking ahead and more so because from those to whom much is given, much is required. We've been given more. We've been given a fulsome presence and power of the Holy spirit available to us and, and double the woe to us if we do not use that opportunity, that potential.

So those who mourn those who are meek, this is, this is humility under pressure. This is

self-control. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness in verse six, they shall be filled.

When is this hunger and thirst for righteousness filled in the present or in the future? Yes. Right now. And then blessed are the merciful.

They shall obtain mercy when presently or in the future. Yes. Blessed are the pure in heart.

They shall see God when now and in the future. No man can see God and live. Got to look at, at Jesus to see him.

Jesus says here, the pure in heart shall see God. You will see him in every page of the old Testament and you will see him in every page of the new Testament. You will see him in nature.

You will see him in the stars. You will see him in his ongoing work in this world. You will see God.

You will be able to identify the presence of God, the power of God, the work of God, the people of God, the truth of God. You will see God pure in heart. How do you become pure in heart? Read Psalm 51.

If you don't have Psalm 51 in the margin next to that verse, I would encourage you to put it there. We cannot purify our heart. Only God can do that.

Blessed are the peacemakers. They shall be called sons of God. Can you imagine someone who, who is awarded this title, a true son of God that would be outside the kingdom? The rod comes down and says, no, not you.

This one can pass under the rod, but not you sons of God are going to be entering the kingdom. Oh, here comes. It'd be like John the Baptist.

Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world when it, when it comes to the rod and who's going to be in the kingdom and who's out behold, here's, here's a true son of God. Come on in entrance into the kingdom. You look at each one of these qualities, each one of these attitudes, each one of these attainments and goals and priorities that Jesus has in this section of Matthew chapter five.

This is what the scribes and Pharisees were discouraging. This is what they were leaving people away from and distracting them to other standards of other evaluations. Just tithe the way I tithe and dress the way I tie a dress and, and, uh, lengthen your tassels and broaden your phylacteries and, uh, follow and, and eight, the long prayers and the other things that I do to be seen by men.

And this is righteousness. You lead people away. You give them a false standard of what

it means to love God and to love one another.

That's what the scribes and Pharisees did. That is what they do to this day. And we have to identify who is on the wrong path and then look at ourselves and make sure that we are not on that same wrong path, hypocrisy, wrong standards, self, uh, exaltation, self gratification, doing what we do to be seen by people instead of from the heart out of love.

And right in the middle of this purity of heart, we have to recognize our poverty of spirit and the impurity of our heart and let God fix that. Spiritual riches only come from God created me a clean heart only comes from God. Renew a right spirit within me, purge me, make me clean.

Let me qualify to offer myself a living sacrifice that is holy and acceptable, which is a reasonable service. So anyone who distracts from recognizing the problem of sin and the poverty of spirit that only God can fix anyone who fails to communicate the means by which we put ourselves in a position for God to do this work within us falls under this. Well, if we fail to pursue and, uh, follow these exhortations in Matthew chapter five, we fall under this woe.

You neither go in nor do you allow others to go in. You lock the door. You tell people, Oh, go around the building.

It's on the other side. And there is no door and there is no access. There is no way to gain possession.

There is no way to be awarded the title. True son of God misleading, misdirecting. It's the snake in the tree.

Oh, that's God really said warning, danger, lookout, woe is coming. That's the first woe. We've got a little bit more to say on that when we come back from our break.

And then we'll take a look at the second woe. It's, it is love anti-matter. It is, it is the equal opposite love annihilator in the second woe.

We'll see that when we come back.