

Matthew 22-01-30b

Let's pick up our study in Matthew chapter 23. We have covered in some detail the woe that Jesus pronounces in verse 13 of chapter 23 against the scribes and Pharisees. The first condemnation, the first charge is hypocrisy.

Appearing, seeking the appearance of righteousness, but the most unrighteous thing you can do is fail the grace of God, be in opposition to God's desire for His people to enter the promised kingdom, to be an enemy instead of a friend, to be a distractor instead of an encourager, to be guilty in a way that not only disqualifies yourself, but affects others. This is going to be a refrain that runs through these woes and think about it. It's not just that the scribes and Pharisees are themselves not going to enter, but their behavior, their example, their efforts have consequences, negative consequences toward others.

We do not live in a vacuum and our failures radiate failure out from us. Notice they shut up the kingdom, they lock the kingdom and they prevent people, Jesus says, who are entering. These are people who are qualified, who are seeking, who are knocking, who are asking, and the Pharisees are preventing qualified people from getting to the kingdom.

Now, does this mean that they won't enter and it's the Pharisees fault? What does it mean? It means God is going to have to find another source of guidance, another source of provision of his word, of his promises and his principles and his doctrines. The proper source, the in some cases self-designated source, the Pharisees sort of elected themselves as the religious leadership in Israel and claimed to be the leadership. They are an obstacle, greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

The Pharisees are in the world and they are of the world. The scribes are in the world and of the world and they are blocking access to the kingdom for those who are entering. They will not stop them from entering, but they're going to have to go around this obstacle.

This obstacle is going to have to be removed and Jesus is basically launching the first attack on this obstacle by pointing it out. The best way to avoid an obstacle is to identify it. This is the whole endeavor for self-driving cars.

What if there's something in the road? Is it just a dark patch of asphalt or is it a giant pothole or is it a rock or an animal carcass or how do you identify the obstacle? Should you take steps? Should you break to a halt? What is behind you? Obstacles are a problem and they need to be solved. Identifying the obstacle is one of the key steps in overcoming it. So that's what Jesus does here.

The things that we saw in Matthew chapter 5 that allow for entrance, that qualify us for

entrance, recognizing our poverty of spirit, understanding that righteousness by faith often comes at a cost. Most of the time today it costs us in relationships. It costs us in distance within families or within social circles or within a place of employment.

Others can seemingly be promoted over us or favored ahead of us or receive more invitations and more of a welcome and more of a seemingly loving treatment. But what kind of love is that? What source of love is that? Is it a community where your sins line up with mine and so we're alike and we're comfortable with each other because we're not going to call that out as a bad pattern or a bad behavior and these are sort of unclean birds of a feather if you will. But Patty made a good point on the break that these standards that are being applied of what is righteousness and what is sin do not match God's.

And people can get together and vote in their own constitution, their own bylaws, their own creed, their own standard that will refer to scripture, use scriptural terms, invoke the name of the Lord and yet when the kingdom comes and they're on the outside and they stand at the door knocking the way Jesus stood at the door of their heart knocking and they didn't let him in, there's going to come a day when he's going to be inside and they're going to be on the outside knocking and they're going to say, Lord, Lord, in your name, did we not do wonderful things? And what is his reply? I never knew you depart from me workers of iniquity. They're invoking what they consider to be good works and Jesus said that was iniquity because what you did was done in the wrong spirit for the wrong reasons measured by the wrong standards and so on. So righteousness comes at a cost.

Take a look at Matthew 5, 19 and 20 in this regard. We're talking about entrance into the kingdom. How can it be blocked? How can you keep otherwise qualified people from getting there? We saw it in Matthew 5, 3 through 10.

Now we're going to look at Matthew 5, 19 and 20. Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men. So isn't this the condemnation you're not going in and you're not letting others go in.

Why you are breaking the least of these commandments teaching men. So least in the kingdom of heaven, whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Notice it's not equality.

There is exaltation and there is humbling. There is a basement. When we humble ourselves, we're exalted.

If we exalt ourselves, we are humbled. There are those who will be great in the kingdom and there are those who will be least and by least, I mean they're in on a visitor pass for a few hours if they get there at all. Now here's the key and this relates to some of our recent investigations into movements within Christianity here of late.

Look at verse 19 again. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments. What commandments? We're in Matthew 5. Has Jesus given any commandments of his own? What commandments is he talking about? Look at verse 17 and 18.

Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill. Assuredly, I say to you till heaven and earth pass away, one yode or one tittle will have by no means passed from the law till all is fulfilled.

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments in the law and the prophets breaks the least of the commandments in the law and prophets. Jesus says adherence to the law of Moses and to the prophets is a basic requirement. It is a part of the basics along with the other things he has already mentioned, which are inward and spiritual, but the outworking of poverty of spirit of mourning of making peace and the other things that were in those first 12 verses.

Righteousness at a cost that heart, that spirit will work itself out in genuine obedience to God's law, acceptable behavior by God's standard in God's eyes. There's nothing wrong with the law. Remember Paul is the law of sin.

Not at all. By the law comes the knowledge of sin. And with the summary of loving God and loving one another as the measure, you can keep the law.

We've studied this. We looked at Exodus. We looked at Exodus 20, the 10 commandments.

Are we breaking the law by meeting today instead of yesterday? Did we break the law yesterday by doing work on Saturday? What is in our hearts? What do we recognize about remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy? If we find regular occasions, we do not have to observe times and seasons, feasts, days, and rituals. But we are enjoined by the commandment to remember the Sabbath day to remember that a day can be any point at which we pause from our work and our efforts and our involvement in the world to stop for worship, to stop and rest in God's provision, to stop and take stock, evaluate. If we get so busy that we never slow down and think about who we are and why we're here, we're breaking the Sabbath.

It doesn't matter what day it is. And when we allow time to come into God's presence in prayer, to reflect on God's word in a meaningful, thoughtful way, looking to express and cultivate our love for God and our love for one another by taking a break. That is the Sabbath.

You can read the first few chapters of Hebrews and get this. There remains a rest for the people of God. And he never mentioned Saturday.

This is a spiritual rest. It is on a spiritual clock in the same way that in my view, the days

of creation in Genesis chapter one are measured on God's clock. Our Sabbath rest is on God's clock.

We are learning to operate on spiritual time in a spiritual environment. But note what he says here. If we succeed in that, if we accomplish and arrive at these qualities that Jesus mentions in verse three and following of this chapter five, by the time you get to verse 17, the Jesus hermeneutic does not abolish the law or the prophets.

Do not think I came to destroy the law or the prophets. If you think that you are wrong, I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill. And this is true for us.

One yod, one tittle will not pass from the law. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, these commandments in the old Testament and teaches men, so shall be called least in the kingdom. Watch out for treating lightly the old Testament scriptures.

All these things were written for our instruction. We've been over it many, many times. Whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

The criteria is the same for Israel entering the millennial kingdom and for us entering the kingdom of the son and the kingdom of the father. The standards do not change. How can you keep the law? You remember in Luke when the Jesus is having a dialogue with a scribe on what is the greatest commandment in the law.

And when Jesus says, love the Lord, your God and love your neighbor. And the scribe says, you are right. And Jesus, what does Jesus say to him? You remember that in Luke, uh, uh, 12, 34, I believe it was.

He tells him you are not far from the kingdom. You're not far from the kingdom. So this is important.

Matthew 5, 19, and 20. Um, you can flip over to Luke chapter six and verse 20, or you can write it down and just wait for me to read it. Luke six 20, Jesus lifted up his eyes toward his disciples and said, and my new King James, this is labeled the beatitudes as though it is a parallel to Matthew chapter five.

And they have it listed as a parallel passage. This is not the sermon on the Mount occasion. It is a similar teaching, but it's on a different occasion.

This is what they call the sermon on the plane, the teaching on the flats. And notice that, uh, this is second person in Matthew chapter five. It's third person.

Blessed are those people over there. They who mourn they, who are poor in spirit here. It is second person blessed.

Are you poor? Yours is the kingdom of God. Notice this is poverty like unto poor in spirit,

but it is recognition of need. That's what Jesus begins with in on both occasions.

Anytime he addressed this body of teaching, you get the idea he started with. You're not going to get anywhere. If you don't recognize your own need in any description of the Pharisees and the self-righteous scribes, do they seem to need anything? Do they need anything pointed out to them? Do they need any more instruction in the word of God? Do they need any more help with their idea of what righteousness is? They've got it all.

They're self-sufficient. I've got, I am full. I see instead of I'm blind.

I need sight. I need insight. So it always starts with need.

If we ever lose our sense of need, we are in trouble. Blessed are you who need yours is the kingdom of God. Your need is going to be filled with all of the goodness of the coming kingdom.

And it'll be filled now in a preview form. Blessed are you who hunger, hunger is a need. I don't have enough.

You who hunger now, you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now for you shall laugh. And this now can be an ongoing now.

We may have tribulation in this life that continues and is of long duration. We can have sorrow. We can have bereavement.

We can have tough times and there is no end in sight. You can get certain medical diagnoses and it's going to be a tough row to hoe from now until the Lord descends from heaven with a shout. But if you weep now, if you hunger now, if you are poor now, and this weeping, generally we weep due to loss, don't we? I don't weep when I get an unforeseen blessing and an unexpected benefit.

I weep when things go wrong. I weep when there is a loss, when there is a deficit and I am without. Blessed are you when men hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and cast out your name as evil.

And they may do this by labels. They may do this by broad brush. Oh, you're a bibliolator.

You're this, you're that. You are guilty of the sins that others who are in your group have committed. And this is again, the fallacy of composition.

If the tire of my car is made of rubber, that doesn't mean the entire car is made of rubber. If my tire was made by firestone, it doesn't mean the whole car was made by firestone. If my tire goes flat, it doesn't mean the whole car is broken.

But to say that there are people in the evangelical church or people of a pale complexion

or people of a male gender or people fill in your descriptor here that have been guilty and genuinely guilty of wrong behavior. It doesn't mean that everybody else in the group shares the blame and the shame, the guilt and the need to reform. And by broad brushing, you end up being the object of hate.

People who broad brush say, well, you're one of them and you need to confess your guilt. You need to confess your gender. You need to confess your race.

You need to confess the sins of your fathers. You know, I get held guilty for slavery and for all kinds of abusive things that have never entered into my mind or my heart just because of how I look and what church I go to and so on. And Jesus says, you look for the blessing when men hate you.

These men who have faulty standards, wrong attitudes, wrong philosophies, wrong theologies, wrong beliefs, distorting, twisting, misrepresenting the truth of God and God himself and Jesus himself. Blessed are you when you're excluded and reviled and your name is thrown out as evil. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy.

Your reward is great in heaven, in the kingdom. That reward has already been written down in heaven. And when the kingdom comes, you're going to get the tangible form of it.

You can get the preview value now. Just knowing that something wonderful and new is on the way can be a source of joy before it ever arrives. In like manner, their fathers did to the prophets and in like manner, they are going to do to Jesus himself.

Misunderstanding, faulty expectation. Well, when the Messiah comes, this is the portrait I've got in my mind of how he's going to look and what he's going to say and what he's going to do, where he's going to be from. He doesn't match that.

So, you know, kill the prophet, shoot the messenger. Woe to you who are rich. You've already got your comfort.

Enjoy your riches while you've got them because you can't take it with you. And for all eternity, you're going to lack. Woe to you who are full.

Now, this is what we want to watch for. These are the woes and they parallel the woes we are looking at in Matthew 23. Have I lost my appreciation for the riches of God's word, the riches of God's truth, the riches that we have and enjoy in Christ Jesus, that beautiful seven branched menorah we saw in Ephesians chapter one.

In him we have, in him we are, in him we possess, in him we inherit, in him we are chosen and our heirs as brothers. Woe to you who are rich, who are full, who are laughing now, who are giddy with joy, who are giddy with self-satisfaction. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, when you're in the echo chamber and everybody is

giving a two thumbs up, everybody's giving a high five.

Woe when the crowd of men by a faulty standard welcome you in and praise your name because that's how they treated the false prophets. We just looked at Micaiah on Wednesday night, such a fascinating episode in connection with the death of King Ahab and all of the false prophets. There's only one prophet willing to speak the truth and he is ignored and defamed.

So back to our passage in Matthew, you shut up the kingdom, you do not go in yourself, you do not let others go in. It is all about what does it take to enter the kingdom. Poverty of spirit, righteousness often at a cost, not doing and not teaching the word of God properly, severe consequences.

Matthew chapter 18, if you just flip back a few pages here from Matthew 23 to 18, you will remember this in our recent studies. Matthew 18 three, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. When I asked my pop quiz question in the first session, this was one of the passages that was rightly mentioned, except you convert, except you change your mind and become as little children.

What defines little children? They need provision, they need protection, they need guidance, they need oversight and care. People of my acquaintance who are in early childhood education can tell you endlessly how much little children need and are not sufficient in and of themselves. You can't just turn them loose inside a fence and expect them to thrive and prosper.

They are needy. Change your mind, recognize that you are poor and miserable and blind and naked. You remember that from revelation, Jesus talking to a church, you think that you're full, you think that you're well-dressed, you think you have everything and you do not realize, you do not recognize, you do not acknowledge, you don't change your mind and look at your need and your neediness.

Got to become as a child. Another passage that was mentioned when I asked my question was Matthew 19, 23 and 24, how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

Why? If you recognize that you are nothing and you have nothing and you bring nothing to the table before God in and of ourselves, we're so small, we can fit through that little hole in the end of the needle. But if I bring my camel, I'm never getting through there, right? Our self-assigned bigness makes it impossible to enter. I need to be so empty that I fit.

Recognition of need. So many of these share that common theme. You can see that we don't have time to turn there, but you can write down these verses, Mark 10, 29, Luke 9,

62.

And look forward now in Matthew, just go forward to Matthew chapter 25. This is our last passage on this point, Matthew 25, 34 through 36. This is the sheep and goats judgment.

The king will say to those on his right hand, come you blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. My father is going to bless you. You're going to inherit this kingdom that was dreamed up, was designed and planned and put into the decrees of God before the world was founded.

Why? Self-sacrificial love. I was hungry. You gave me food.

I was thirsty. You gave me drink. I was a stranger.

You took me in. I was naked. You clothed me.

I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was hungry. You gave me food.

I was a stranger and you took me in. If you have done it to the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto me. This is how important love for your neighbor, love for one another is.

It is the fulfillment of the commands. Don't break even the least of them. A great deal of the law is dedicated to taking care of your neighbor.

Don't bear false witness against him. Don't covet his stuff. Don't do him injury.

Look out for the widows and the orphans and the stranger in your midst, often at a sacrificial cost to yourself. Entrance into the kingdom depends on not just loving God, but loving one another. The hypocritical scribes and Pharisees are utterly lacking in this department.

The second woe, quickly now in chapter 23, verse 15. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you travel land and sea to win one proselyte. When he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

Now, what does this mean? Jesus in the preceding portion of this chapter talked about not getting people to join their group, but tying sticks together and binding them into bundles and putting them on the shoulders of the people. They are not trying to make everybody in town a Pharisee. They're not recruiting everybody to be a scribe, are they? What is a proselyte? And I found a bunch of commentaries with which I strongly disagree because they were talking about proselytes to Judaism and, you know, proselyte of the gate and bringing Gentiles in and trying to make them Jews and so on.

I don't see that here at all. And I respectfully disagree with those who do because look at the context as we often try to do. The common people, the Pharisees want to lord it over

them.

They want to be exalted above them. They want to have the hoi polloi above whom they stand out as righteous and leaders and knowledgeable and experts in the law and detail oriented keepers of the law. And I am so far above you because of all of my attainments and so on.

This proselyte, they travel land and sea to find one. If it was a matter of making all the people Pharisees, you don't have to travel anywhere. You're in their midst.

Why are they having to travel? It takes a special kind of person to enter into this level of self-righteousness. This is an elite club and they are scouring the land. The sea here is the sea of Galilee.

They'll even go to Galilee. They'll travel up to Nazareth and the environs. They'll go across into Decapolis.

They will go anywhere. By the way, they will even go to Tarsus. Do you remember? Turn to Acts chapter nine, Acts nine, Paul is recounting or his story is being recounted here in chapter nine.

Saul, still breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus so that he found anyone who were of the way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. He is a zealot. Where did the Pharisees have to go to get Saul? Turn to Acts chapter 22 and we'll get the answer.

This is where Paul is going to give his own testimony. Acts chapter 22, verse three. Remember he's talking to his brethren and fathers.

Hear my defense before you now. They heard him speaking in Hebrew, so they kept all the more silent. Oh, he's one of us.

He's a member of the club. He knows Hebrew, actually Aramaic here. He said, I am indeed a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel.

They shipped him from Tarsus to Jerusalem as a boy to be trained from his youth by Gamaliel. They had to travel the land and the sea to find a guy like Saul with this level of zeal, this level of interest, this level of dedication. Saul is the poster boy for traveling land and sea to make a proselyte.

And boy, did they succeed. None of them wanted to leave Jerusalem and go to Damascus and hunt down people who were of the way, but Saul would go. Why? Because they have made him twofold the child of hell that they are brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel taught according to the strictness of our father's laws,

zealous toward God as you all are today.

I persecuted this way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons, both men and women twofold, the child of hell made. So, you know, I think Saul had a genuine interest in the word of God, but he was misled by academia. He was misled by elite theologians who had a faulty and false grip on the old Testament, which were the scriptures of the day.

Be warned, watch out, do not be sucked in and speak up. If you are in the vicinity of young people who are being intensely targeted and drawn from within the church by people who are doing this very same thing, I will make proselytes. They didn't go to the Gentiles.

They went to the interior. This was an attack from within. We are leaders in this faulty way, and we're going to find others that we can raise up.

We'll train them up from childhood. We'll, we'll get the young people. We'll get them to adopt our legalism, our mishandling and misrepresentation.

We're, we're not going into this so-called kingdom and we'll make sure they don't go in either. We'll train them up right. Proselytes to Pharisaism, legalism, such as themselves, got to travel to find people that are so zealous and able to be led down this path who don't have a foundation, who can be misled, who can be deceived, who can be misguided.

And Saul of Tarsus was misled, deceived and misguided by the doctors of the law in Jerusalem. He went to the school of theology at Oxford, as it were. They go to the university of Edinburgh in Scotland and dish out PhDs and such.

He went, Gamaliel was the highest guy in the land and he got made twofold the child of hell there. And he was persecuting the genuine people of God. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and cast out your name.

Saul was doing it. Something for which he will grieve greatly. But notice again, it's one thing to not go in yourself, but look at the effect, look at the bursting radius and the detrimental influence on others.

Because when people go down this road, they've got to spread it. It's a metastasizing cancer. It is a malignancy that needs more recruits, needs more followers, needs more to lord over, needs more to call them by their titles, needs more people to follow their way.

Hypocrites. And that brings us to the third woe, which is something you can look up between now and next week. It's casuistry, casuistry, C-A-S-U-I-S-T-R-Y.

This is a good word that will describe what Jesus is going to take several verses

beginning at verse 16 and going all the way down to verse 22, talking about misrepresenting priorities, misrepresenting God, missing his presence, missing his standards completely. It's casuistry. And we'll look at that next time.

But we've got plenty to chew on in these first two woes, because it is one thing to be outward looking and to identify problems as Jesus is doing here. But rather than standing with Jesus and looking out on those who are failing, it is a safer, better and more productive course for us to see to what extent we are in the crowd to whom Jesus is talking. And we are guilty of those things that he is calling out.

It does me no good to stand with Jesus and condemn. It does me all kinds of good to take his observations and his condemnations and his warnings to heart and to go to God as David did and say, search me and know my heart. Try me and see if there be any wicked way in me.

Show me my secret faults, my hidden faults. This is the healthy way to digest what Jesus is saying here. Yes, it is prevalent in the world.

I do not want to be infected. If you want to talk about distancing and filtering and the rest of it, here's where you can productively avoid infection and look for symptoms and get early treatment from God himself. Well, much more to see here.

This is such a fascinating chapter and we'll pick it up here next time, but we'll close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the power of your word to expose the thoughts and intents of our hearts in the hands of your Holy Spirit. It is not only the sword that divides us and pierces to the center of us, but it is the scalpel that can remove what is dangerous and what is evil and can enable us to heal and can restore us and enable and empower us to live a life that is pleasing in your sight, that is woven into your purposes and your plans for the present and for the future.

We pray that as we reflect on what we've seen this morning, the Holy Spirit will help us to see our personal need, our personal opportunity to be cleansed, to become pure in heart and from that pure heart to love you and love one another. We pray it in Jesus name. Amen.