

Matthew 22-02-06a

Good morning and welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the sixth day of February, 2022. We're in the Gospel of Matthew.

We're in chapter 23. We're looking at the seven woes that Jesus pronounces upon the Pharisees. Very pungent piece of scripture.

We have looked at the first two woes in some detail and we're going to pick up this morning in the vicinity of verse 16 with the third of the seven woes, Matthew 23, 16. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship, on our retention of the things that we see, on our ability to receive the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, both in understanding and in finding the pertinence and application of these truths in our own lives. Shall we pray? Father, we are grateful for this opportunity to spend time together, having our souls nourished from the truth of your word with the supernatural ministry of your Holy Spirit presiding and enabling our gifts of encouragement, of thoughtfulness, of prayer, of the opportunity to be strengthened and encouraged through being united with fellow members of the body of Christ.

We pray that as we examine this portion of your word together this morning, that we will find fruitful grounds for application and for establishing our goals, our values, and our priorities as we invest the remainder of the time you've allotted to us in this life in righteousness by faith and in reflecting the glory of your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray it in his name, amen. We begin by reading our passage.

We'll start in the earlier part of the chapter here. Jesus begins by talking about the scribes and Pharisees in verse two. We'll pick up in verse eight.

You, disciples, you people, you receptive individuals, do not be called rabbi. One is your teacher, one is your leader, and you are all brethren. Do not view spiritual relationships, horizontal relationships, the one another relationships in hierarchical terms when it comes to understanding of the word of God.

We do have hierarchy. We do have authority structures that God has ordained, that God has put in place. And these authorities are overseen by him.

They are accountable to him. Husbands are accountable in a marriage. Parents are accountable in a family.

Officers are accountable in the way they function in the military. Those in governmental authority are accountable to God. It's a more interesting problem in a representative democracy such as we used to have in this country where we like to think that the leadership is accountable to the people.

If that is the model, it is important that that accountability be respected and not

bypassed and not undermined and rendered a mere pretense and for show, which I believe has happened in recent decades. But there is accountability. But when it comes to the word of God, when it comes to the authority of God's word, the truth embodied in its fullness in the Lord Jesus Christ, we do not defer, we do not allow that to be filtered or dependent upon some intermediary.

We have God's Holy Spirit. We have God's word. And we do not raise up a spiritual hierarchy such as you find in ritualistic and religionistic churches.

The Catholic Church with its layers and layers of bishops and cardinals and popes and so on. And there are other churches that have adopted such a model. Jesus says, no, do not be called something above.

Don't establish a clergy in distinction to the laity. Just because somebody has duties in the kitchen and in dishing out the food doesn't make them any better, any higher, any more authoritative. Authority does not come from the gift.

It comes from God's truth. And other than maintaining good order in a church, that's the extent of a pastor's quote unquote authority. The authority resides in Christ and in the word of God that reflects him.

And to the extent that a teacher or a pastor accurately communicates that, the teaching will have authority, not the teacher. Any more than the angels who brought the message of God to people, Old Testament and new, themselves had any authority. Their responsibility is to accurately communicate the word that they have been entrusted to impart.

But anytime somebody tried to bow down and worship an angel, that angel raises him up and says, don't worship me. You look at the angel toward the close of the book of Revelation, where John wants to honor the angel. And he says, no, no, I'm a messenger just like you.

So do not let anyone call, do not be called rabbi. Don't let anyone call you rabbi. Verse nine, do not call anyone on earth your father.

One is your father, he who is in heaven. Do not be called teachers. One is your teacher, the Christ.

Messengers need to accurately communicate the message and then get out of the way. It should not be an issue. They shouldn't do what the Pharisees, the scribes, the teachers of the law in Jesus day had manifestly done, which was to make an issue of themselves and to parade themselves as somehow having importance beyond other Jews.

He who is greatest among you, verse 11, shall be your servant, shall be your servant. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant. This is sort of a double-edged sword

because the ones who are currently greatest among you shall in the future end up being servants.

But the first shall be last. Those who are greatest shall be least, shall be called least in the kingdom and so on. On the other hand, he who would be greatest, he who is going to be greatest shall be your servant in the present.

Those who are of a servant mentality recognize that their role is that of a servant, just as the Lord Jesus himself did not think his greatness as the son of God was a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself and took on the form of a servant. The function of a servant came in the likeness of men. And because he came as a servant, and because he served and fulfilled God's plan and God's purpose and God's will, not my will, but thine be done, for this reason, God has highly exalted him and given him a name above every name.

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled. He who humbles himself will be exalted. How do we humble ourselves? It's not aw shucks and sticking our toe in the dirt with a false humility, self denigration, self abnegation.

It is by fulfilling the function, getting past appearances and looking at how can I serve? I don't need to be seen. I don't need to be appreciated. I don't need to be applauded.

I don't need an obligatory applause scene, such as you find at the end of almost every movie made in the last 30 or 40 years. Hollywood thinks applause is the highest attainment, the highest achievement, the approval and approbation of others. And in the most ridiculous circumstances possible, you find crowds applauding at the end of these fictional accounts.

And once you see the shallow nature of that, you can't unsee it. And now, every time we get to the end of one of these stories and everybody is standing around applauding and nodding, you think, you know, this is Hollywood's idea of glory. And what a sham, what an ephemeral, temporary, unfunctional, non-useful ending.

Anyway, then in verse 13, we begin these woes. You remember there are seven of them. Verse 14, cross it out.

It isn't that it's not true. It is that it is not a part of Matthew's message. It is a part of the message in Luke and in Mark, but not here.

And it throws the balance off as we shall see this morning. So the first woe, and by the way, when you find a sevenfold impartation of truth, you immediately begin to think in chiasmic terms. I will plant that seed and you can think about it when the things I'm saying become uninteresting, you can start thinking about what the implications of that would be in this passage.

If this is sevenfold, and if it is somewhat chiasmic, then you know where the most important material is to be found. So woe number one in verse 13, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites for, this is the Greek preposition *hati*, and it means because. This is the basis for the judgment.

These are pronouncements of guilt and consequent penalty. The woe is pronounced because of something. You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

You are guilty and woe is the penalty. And the nature of this woe will be detailed a bit further on. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

This is the guilt. It is hypocrisy to pose as one thing and actually be another. To misunderstand, to misjudge, and to act accordingly.

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. We talked about this in detail last time.

I'm not gonna review the interpretation and application there. The second woe is in verse 15. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel land and sea to win one proselyte.

And when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. A son of hell. This is a son of Gehenna.

This is a son of loss and destruction. This is the city dump, the valley of the sons of Hinnom. The city dump in Jerusalem started out as a dump and ended up being a graveyard.

We pick up this morning in verse 16. Woe to you blind guides who say, whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing. But whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.

Fools and blind, which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And you can make a correction now in verse 17. You have a text note there and it is a good one. It is sanctified, past tense.

The temple that sanctified the gold. We're gonna have two of these and they're important. Verse 18, and whoever swears by the altar, you say it is nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged.

He is obligated. Fools and blind, which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore, he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by him who, past tense, dwelt in it.

Dwelt, past tense. You immediately see why these tenses are important. God does not dwell in this temple that Jesus speaks of.

He dwelt in the past. We know what happened to the presence and the glory of God from Ezekiel. We know from the reconstructive days of Haggai and Zechariah, of Joshua and Zerubbabel, that the glorious presence of God never appeared to inhabit this second temple.

Dwelt, past tense. Verse 22, and he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by him who sits on it. Knowing that the woes extend all the way down through verse 29 and sort of fade into another topic after that, you can see that this third woe contained in verse 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22 is the most extensive, the most detailed, and in some ways, the most significant of these woes.

It is the third in a sequence of seven. It will be followed by the fourth in verse 23. The fourth will lie at the center of this set of seven.

So as we saw last time, this is sort of the antichrist to the Christ. This is the antithesis of what we found in Matthew chapter five with the beatitudes. The beatitudes are the positive side.

If you keep your finger here in Matthew 23 and flip back as we did last week to Matthew chapter five, blessed are, blessed are, blessed are. These were third person and there are essentially 10 of them. One in verse three, two in verse four, three in verse five, four in verse six, five in verse seven, six in verse eight, seven in verse nine, eight in verse 10, nine in verse 11, and there is a new element in verse 12.

Those you are identified with the prophets of the past. One of the links between these 10 beatitudes in Matthew chapter five and the seven woes in Matthew chapter 23, one of the hinge pins is in verse 12 of Matthew five. So they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus is gonna have a lot to say about the prophets in the last part of chapter 23, as you will recall. But blessing is pronounced for these who are in servant mode. Those who are humble, those who are of low estate, those who do not promote themselves.

They are poor in spirit, they mourn, they are meek, they hunger and thirst for righteousness, they are merciful, they're pure in heart, they are peacemakers, they are persecuted and they are reviled and are the targets of all kinds of evil evaluation, evil denigration. And they should rejoice and be exceedingly glad. And the final blessed are you is essentially doubled.

It is a double portion, which gives me my count of 10 in verse 11 and in verse 12. Because not only are you blessed when you are reviled and persecuted, but rejoice and be exceeding glad, great is your reward in heaven because they persecuted the prophets who were before you in a similar way. And that sort of hidden 10th blessing is the reason you're being reviled and persecuted for my sake, Jesus says, is because you

represent the truth of the word of God, the communication of God's message, God's presence, God's power, the things pertaining to God like the prophets did.

For my sake is one way of putting it and doing what the prophets did and being persecuted on that basis is the other. So 10 in Matthew chapter five, culminating with the treatment of the prophets. And we're gonna find that this condemnation phase in Matthew 23 also culminates with the treatment of the prophets.

So here we are in verse three, woe to you blind guides. They have been excoriated by Jesus. They have been condemned, charged and found guilty of hypocrisy.

In verse 13, the first woe, you are hypocrites. In verse 15, the second woe, hypocrites. There's nothing intrinsically bad about being a scribe.

There's nothing intrinsically bad about being a Pharisee. There are some good Pharisees in the scriptural record. What is the condemnatory element? The element is hypocrite.

There is no such thing as a good hypocrite. You can't find, you can be a good scribe. You can be a properly oriented faithful man and be a Pharisee.

You cannot in any way justify being a hypocrite. This is the guilt. But in verse three, I'm sorry, the third woe in verse 16, woe to you blind guides.

The charge, there's no way a blind guide is going to be a good guide. A guide needs to see and know the right way and not be blind to what is right, blind to what is good. So the charge here is blind guides.

And you will see this repeated as we go through this third woe with its seven verses. So that was the first verse of this third woe, verse 16. Whoever, woe to you blind guides who say, remember we saw, woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut up the kingdom.

Woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses and for a pretense, make long prayers. Oh, I'm sorry. I'm, I've got a big X to that verse and I read it anyway.

You remember in verse 15, woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel land and sea to make a proselyte. This is the only of the woes, the only one of the woes where we don't have that hot T-H-O-T-I that is translated for or because. Here, it is given as a positive.

Woe to you who say, you could put it in parentheses, because you are those who say. The because is implied rather than stated, but it's definitely here. Woe to you blind guides who say, whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.

Let's just stop and think about this for a minute. So we're talking about taking an oath and whether that oath obligates you to do what you said you would do. I swear by the temple, I will pay you by next Tuesday.

Those of you that ever watched Popeye know what I'm talking about. I will gladly repay you on Tuesday. I swear by the temple, I will fulfill this promise.

Scribes and Pharisees said, you don't have to pay by Tuesday. You don't have to do what you promised because you swore by the temple. Now, if you had said, Simon says, if you had said, I swear by the gold of the temple, you are absolutely obligated and we'll bring you up on charges and find you guilty in the people's court because you swore by the gold of the temple.

Now, why is this an issue? We don't take oaths by various elements of spiritual life in Israel having to do with the temple or its gold or the things that Jesus is about to mention next. So why is this important? Well, let's read the rest of it and it will become clear. Fools and blind.

Notice this is the second time Jesus has called them blind. You are blind guides. Now he says, you are fools and blind.

This is literally morons. This is the Greek word *moros* from which we get *moron* and it means fool. This is not the gentle Jesus with a child in his lap when he says, woe to you blind guides.

You are fools and blind. Why? Here's where you have your for in verse 17. For which is greater? It's in English, it's for, it's a little different in Greek.

Which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? There's a lot of gold. Most of us have gold jewelry, a wedding ring, a tie tack, earrings, necklaces, and such. Is that gold special? What makes gold special in the world of Israel? Once this gold is hammered into the shape of a cherub, once this gold is hammered into the shape of a seven branch candlestick, once this gold covers the table of showbread, once it becomes a part of the accouterments of the tabernacle or later the temple, that gold is special because of where it is and the function that it serves.

Its value is in its position, in its positional truth. It can be gold like any other gold, but because of where it is, it's different. Which is greater? The gold or the temple that makes the gold special? More about that upcoming.

Verse 18. And you say, whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing. I swear on the altar of God, I will pay you by Tuesday.

I swear on the altar of God, I will be there and help you with this task. I swear by the altar of God that this is what I saw or this is what I did not see. Fools and blind.

This is the third condemnation of blindness. You cannot see. And because you do not see, you are a fool.

Which is greater? The gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? You say, whoever swears by the gift on the altar, he's obliged. If you swear by the sacrifice, now you're obligated. But swearing by the altar, you can ignore that.

That's, it's a trick. You can fool uninformed people, especially outsiders. And when some foreigner you've made a business deal with and then you don't hold up your end or you're giving testimony and you lie and they say, how could you lie? You swore by the altar.

Ah, but I didn't swear by the sacrifice on the altar. I didn't swear by the gift on the altar. So unlucky you.

You didn't know the rules of the little game we play. Fools and blind. Which is greater? The gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? There are a lot of animals.

There's a lot of wheat. There are a lot of doves. There's a lot of various kinds of things that can be offered to God outside.

When do they become special? When they go inside and when they are dedicated to God, placed before God. When it is the altar that makes that animal or that sheaf of grain or whatever it may be, that meal offering, it becomes special at the point that it contacts God's altar. Therefore, verse 20, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by all things on it.

He who swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwelt in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits on it. The implication is here that these people would also say, I swear by heaven, but I haven't sworn by God, so I'm okay.

If you swear by heaven, you swear by the throne of God and by the God who sits on that throne. Now, what would be the application of this for us? Because we're not really given to swearing and differentiating between oaths. What is this really about? Let's back up to verse 15, the second woe.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. You travel land and sea to win one proselyte. When he is won, you make him twice as much a son of Gehenna as yourselves.

A son of garbage, a son of gravestones as yourself. How would you describe this activity of traveling land and sea to win one proselyte? They went all the way to Tarsus to recruit young Saul and bring him to Jerusalem and sit him at the feet of Gamaliel because he was from a prominent family and he had a gifted mind and so on. And they traveled the

land and sea to get all the way out there and bring him in and initially he was twofold a child of hell.

He did things that the ones in Jerusalem wouldn't even do. He was willing to travel to Damascus and hail into prison these reprobate Jews who had embraced Christ and Christianity. What would you call that activity though? Is this a characteristic? It's an activity, right? I would call this a goal.

Their goal is to perpetuate their hypocrisy, to find others who can be twofold the hypocrite that they are, twofold the blind guide that they are. And Jesus said, you canvass the heaven and the earth. You are seeking, you are looking for someone to evangelize.

You are looking for someone to recruit. And when you've recruited them, you make them even worse than yourself. It's a goal.

In the third woe, you blind guides, blind fools, fools and blind. You fail to distinguish the importance of the altar or the gift that is on the altar. You fail to distinguish the value of the temple or the gold that is in the temple.

I would suggest to you that this is evil values, faulty values. And because you start by wrongly valuing the temple versus its gold, you wrongly value the altar versus the sacrifice. You wrongly value heaven versus the God who dwells there.

Because of faulty values, you devalue obligations. I'm not obligated because I know the difference between the importance of the altar and the gift that is on it. I know the difference between the temple and the gold that is in it, and they don't.

This is false and evil value system. They value the approbation of men and they do not value the approbation of God. The blindness here is blind to what is important, blind to what is true, blind to what matters.

And this is grotesquely malformed values. By having bad goals, bad values, what do you think is going to happen in the fourth woe in verse 23? Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, for you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith. You prioritize making sure you dot these I's and cross these T's with regard to the things that grow in your garden, but you do not recognize the priority in the law where God says, I desire mercy and not sacrifice and obedience more than the fat of rams.

What does the Lord require of you, oh man, but to do justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly. So these bad values, these faulty goals, misplaced understandings end up with bad priorities. Goals, values, priorities.

You have it right here in the center of this discussion. Your goal is to reproduce. Your

goal is to make more like yourself, to increase the size of the club.

You misvalue your obligations because you misvalue the basis upon which you view the world. You think the sacrifice that you bring is more important than the altar that sanctifies it. You think the gold that people like you hammered into the accouterments and the decorations and the facilities and the substances within the temple is more important than the presence of God that used to sanctify that temple and what that temple represents in terms of the presence of God.

And you think heaven is something to invoke rather than the God who makes heaven have meaning. Bad values. So yes, we don't oblige ourselves.

We don't obligate ourselves by oaths that invoke various religious elements, but we do establish a system within ourselves, within our hearts and within our minds of goals, of values, and therefore, those get expressed in our priorities. I prioritize what I think has value and I prioritize things that contribute to my goals, right? This is sort of like faith, hope, and love. Love is the outworking, love is the measure, love is the result.

Well, our priorities reflect and bring to fruition what our goals and values are. And that is at the heart of the condemnation because these scribes and Pharisees, these hypocrites, these blind, foolish guides, all three things are fouled up and yet they are purporting to represent God. Well, we are to represent the Lord Jesus Christ as his body on this earth and it is incumbent on us to not fall under this kind of condemnation for having adopted foolish goals, self-centered goals, self-gratification as a goal by misvaluing what is important, not understanding what is truly important and what therefore makes other things important or not.

There is a proper understanding of what is important, but what is important always pertains to God. The gift comes from man, the altar came from God. The gold is hauled in by man, but the temple came from God.

The heavens were created by God, but they're significant because God dwells in his throne room in the third heaven. And to understand what makes something important, what gives something value is incumbent on us. This is why we're engaged in the study of God's word.

Well, it's hard to be cheerful and optimistic when you're looking at this passage of condemnation, but as we continue in the second session, we're going to see that there is a wonderful opportunity for us to be encouraged, to be motivated. And this is what Jesus led with. You notice that in chapter 23, he began by talking to his disciples and he said, "Be careful, don't start the path." How do you get to this egregiously bad and condemned status that the scribes and Pharisees are in? It starts with small things.

It starts with allowing someone to elevate you instead of saying, look, don't call me

father, don't call me rabbi, don't call me teacher. Let's look to the Lord. We have one father, we have one teacher.

Don't make an issue out of me. Let's all look together at our father, our teacher. You are all brethren.

We are brethren. That is the beginning. This is the step away that prevents falling into the pit that the scribes and Pharisees, these hypocritical religious leaders, are so far into that they cannot get out.

Well, we have more to see, more to say about this when we come back from our break.