

Matthew 22-02-06b

I want to thank Dan and Anna and Lori for our musical offering today. I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus of Galilee. Nazareth doesn't rhyme with the end of the second line.

But My Savior's Love, I think, is the official title of that. I was reading something very well put this past week in a book I'm traveling through. The observation was made that as we endeavor to communicate the truth, and Jesus begins this section talking about those who purport to be teachers, who purport to be rabbis, who purport to be guides in communication, this is a day in which many people are illiterate.

They are not able to read a scroll. They don't have a copy of the Bible for themselves. They're very dependent upon their leaders to impart, communicate, explain, and in many ways be an example of living the truth.

And we had a similar situation in centuries gone by where there were many people that were not particularly literate or didn't have the means or the opportunity to spend a lot of time perusing the Word of God for themselves. And so the way that much of the truth God communicated was through hymns and the lyrics of those hymns. And this is why I think many of our greatest and most truthful and doctrinally significant hymns originated over a hundred years ago, in some cases over 150 or 200 years ago, is that this was a wonderful way of reaching those who were in humble circumstances, those who weren't overly educated or overly provided with opportunities to access written materials to transfer and make memorable the truth.

And the distillation of Scripture that you find in so many of the great classic hymns of the faith is a wonderful treasure in that regard. And in this day of what I would call pseudo-literacy, people can type on their phones and there is a sea of information to which you can be privy. But how can you get the Word of God across in the short attention span theater of the modern day? Lecture is a very inefficient format.

People that are much younger than 40 can't really imbibe information in a lecture format. And that's been the standard in the Christian church for hundreds of years. So how can they be reached? If we can encourage, promote, and circulate the great hymns of the faith, this is a way to get around the limitations of attention span, of format, of availability.

It's not easy to get people to pay attention for more than a few minutes because we live in a headline-based culture. And the value of this music is my point. It is valuable.

Our hymnology is a treasure because it is like the Psalms. Those in Israel who didn't have the Pentateuch available, didn't have written forms of the prophets or the historical books and even the wisdom literature, what did they have? What could they take with them? At the assembly feasts, at the times of worship, the Levites singing the truth of

God was an important means of imparting and reviewing and reminding the people of God about the word of God, the truth of God, the character of God, the plan and purposes of God. And it's such a valuable treasure to have these hymns.

And as I think I mentioned a week or two back, it's also important that they be hymns and not praise songs. Praise songs, the modern format in which Christian music is presented is generally now predominantly performance-based. It is a single soloist or a small group, often in church and in live worship, presented at the front of the group on a stage with lights and amplification, and it's a performance.

And it is extremely difficult to overcome the subjectivity of a performance-based musical presentation. You think about expression, the artists themselves are concerned about their appearance and their vocalizations and their individualistic interpretations of the song. The great thing about hymns, everybody sings.

Maybe you have a choir in the front, but everybody is singing. We're all singing at the same tempo, the same words, the same tune, some harmony in there for enhancement, but it's a unifying experience because we are all doing it together. Good voice, bad voice, make a joyful noise, but hymnology and the great hymns of the faith, such as we just heard, unify us.

A little difficult to be unified in terms of timing if we tried to sing together over a internet-based collection or assembly, but, and I miss that, and we may eventually find a way around it. I understand that there is some technology where we could literally sing together, which I think would be great, but we have sung together enough to be reminded and to enjoy that experience vicariously as we listen to these wonderful instrumental performances of classic hymns of the faith, and it just doesn't get any better than that. The words run through your mind, and it is a tremendous blessing, and I'm very grateful to the Godbold family for enabling us to enjoy that blessing every time we meet basis.

It's something I cannot do or offer, and I am so blessed by it. Back to our study now in Matthew chapter 23. As we continue our study in Matthew 23, and we've looked now at the first two woes in verses 13 and 15, and the third woe in verse 16 and following is what we are now occupied with, and my suggestion is that the pertinence, the traction that this has for us is the condemnation that Jesus' words represent on these religious leaders is on their values.

They consider some things important and others not, and they've got it completely backwards, completely backwards. It is the opposite of what they think, and where they think some things are important and others are not, Jesus says it's all important. He's going to say the same thing in the fourth woe about tithing.

You've neglected the greater weightier matters of the law, and you should have paid

attention to these without leaving the other undone. Nothing wrong with the other, but you've made it the only thing instead of concomitant with the weightier and greater things. If you paid attention to the greater elements, the truths that the law imparts, which he has just reviewed in the recent context of the law and the prophets are fulfilled by loving God and loving one another, we're going to see a re-emphasis on that point.

It doesn't mean that you can observe those and be free from the other matters that you've just picked a portion and said this is important and you've got the gnat and the camel. We'll get there. But here's one application.

I think this has wide applications in a number of areas of life. If we are going to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith, if we are going to judge ourselves lest we be judged, lest we come under greater condemnation as Jesus invokes here, we need to understand the outworking. I'm going to give you an example application.

In fact, it has been said, this is some of the clearest teaching anywhere in the gospels from the lips of Jesus. You don't need a lexicon. You don't need a bunch of Old Testament context.

You don't need a lot of cultural reference to understand what Jesus is saying here. This is not a parable. It's not symbolic.

It's not euphemistic. It isn't at the second or third level where you have to have a foundation. It's not a lump in the soil where you need your pick and your shovel to dig and find the truth.

It's right out here in the open because these people are capable of understanding nothing else. It is very clear. It is inescapable.

It is undeniable. And there is no confusion. There is no lack of clarity here at all.

So we should not have any problem in understanding its import because it is so clear. So what is the message here? Well, let me offer you by way of, we've observed it. We understand the interpretation.

What is the application of this third woe in particular? As I said, this is the most lengthy. This is the most illustrated. Jesus gives three separate illustrations of these values gone wrong and of misunderstanding the relationship between things that pertain to God.

The temple and the gold in the temple are a response. And we're seeing that in Haggai and Zechariah to God's word. God said, build the temple, you know, three times over.

God said, build the tabernacle. The Israelites did. God said, build the temple.

David financed and underwrote it and Solomon accomplished it. God said, rebuild the temple. And you have Joshua and Zerubbabel at the behest of Haggai and Zechariah

getting it done.

The temple is a reflection of obedience to God's command and God's word and the materials from which it is constructed. Same thing with the altar. Same thing in heaven itself.

Although to a greater degree, it's not, there's no man-made elements in heaven, but heaven was created by God and God sits on his throne and his absolute, imminent and transcendent presence is centered in heaven. So these things are true and biblical. What does it mean to us? We're not in the habit of swearing.

We like Matthew 5.37, let your yes be yes and your no be no. Repeated by the way in James 5.12. Above all things, James says in 5.12, above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath. Let your yea be yea and your nay, nay, lest you fall into condemnation.

They like to say, you know, the gospels were written late. Obviously, they, they are at least the material in them was familiar to James because he is basically citing the words of Jesus in this regard. We saw the same thing in Matthew 5.37, depending on which, which version you appeal to.

You have in the New King James, let your yes be yes and your no, no. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. Whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

That's, that's powerful. We saw that months ago in Matthew 5.37. So again, what is our application? Since we understand that when we say we will be somewhere or do something, that should be all the same as if we had sworn an oath. Our integrity matters.

The reflection and the function and the fulfillment of promise, of commitment, goes all the way to court, goes all the way to the wedding ceremony. The ultimate purpose of the wedding ceremony is to have a body of witnesses hear the man and the woman say to each other, I plight you my truth. I pledge my truth.

I pledge my loyalty. Till death do us part, whatever circumstances may entail, I commit myself to you. It is a commitment.

We have a lot of ceremonial trappings and in some cases, baggage associated with it. There's all kinds of knives and cakes and kneeling and candles and hoopla associated with it, but it centers on that moment when there is a formal commitment made in the presence of witnesses. Boaz did this with Ruth.

We're going back listening through our Ruth study. It's short. There's only like seven lessons in it and it's a wonderful study.

When there is a lack of commitment, problems ensue. Think Samson and Delilah, the lack of commitment in both directions. So what is our application here in terms of this swearing? We understand that our identity in Christ before God should guarantee the truth of our statements, our commitments.

What beyond that? Because this is a long woe, the longest. So how else can we understand it? Well, I've already suggested that it is a condemnation of faulty values, evil evaluations, and the evil perversion of what is valuable. Let me suggest something to you that bears on some recent studies that we have done.

The progressive Christian view centers on the Jesus hermeneutic. And you can find this all over the place in Keith Giles, one of the foremost spokesmen of this. He has an article that he published a few years ago that is entitled, Wrath is not capital N, capital O, capital T. Wrath is not one of God's attributes.

And he quotes 1 John 4, 7 and 8. Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. Every time I point out that God is love, Giles says, and quote the verse in the New Testament that affirms this truth, someone will invariably try to counter this by saying, yes, but God is also wrathful.

But is God wrathful? Is that who God is? Let's see. Then he goes on to quote all of the verses that affirm love. You can go to Romans 8, 35 and following, which will separate us from the love of Christ.

We are more than conquerors through him that loved us. Height, depth, any other creature can't separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, saved us by grace, the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

That's out of Ephesians 2, 4 through 7. He goes to Ephesians 3, you rooted and grounded in love has strength to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. So to summarize, Giles says, God is love. Nothing will ever separate us from God's love.

God's love is higher, wider, longer and deeper than anyone could ever realize. We should strive to comprehend this love that surpasses knowledge. We haven't even mentioned Paul's opus in 1 Corinthians 13, keep no record of wrongs, be patient, kind and humble.

Love is greater than faith or hope. Love will never fail or come to an end. Fruits of the spirit, love is the first in the list, so on.

There are verses in the Bible that speak about the wrath of God. I admit it, he puts in bold face. However, I think it's more than possible that those verses are projections and assumptions the writers had about God that were later corrected by Jesus and the

apostles.

Quote, the conception among most Christians is that God is angry with us and that if we don't repent, he will pour out his wrath on us. Yes, we have sinned horribly against God. We denied him for that we must repent.

If we want to enter the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, eternal life. But this is a continuation of the quote. For those that don't repent, is it God's wrath that will be poured out on them? Or is it the lies and violence of the unrepentant themselves? They will come back on their own head.

Throughout the Bible, we see that the pit the wicked dug, they themselves fall into. The snare that evil people set, they get caught in themselves. In depictions of Satan, for example, Goliath and Haman, he is almost always killed with his own weapon.

The repentant have become merciful, blameless and purified. And to the repentant, God shows himself as such. But to the unrepentant, the crooked, such as Psalm 18, God makes himself seem torturous.

It seems to them like God is vengeful, spiteful and vindictive, pouring his wrath out on them. However, in reality, it is their own lies and violence that are coming back on their own heads. This is a key insight from the scriptures that we need to take seriously.

The wrath of God is quite often something experienced as the fruit of one's own actions, rather than a direct action of God against the unrighteous, et cetera, et cetera. If you really want to wade through to the end, you can look this up. It's in Giles' blog on patheos.com and he posted it in October of 2019.

But here's my point. The law of love, the notion of enemy love, God is love, we love because he first loved us and it's all about love. All you need is love is a fruit of the Jesus hermeneutic.

The example of Jesus and the words of Jesus selectively looked at and applied should be the defining truths of our Christian walk, our Christian faith, and our Christian identity. How do we know the words and the works of Jesus Christ? Where do we get that information? This is not Giles talking now, this is me talking. This is me asking this question.

We find it in the Bible. What is the routine condemnation of those who want to value the entire Bible? Well, you're bibliolators. You don't understand that these expressions of the wrath of God and so on were the writers misunderstanding God, misattributing wrath and anger to God when they just didn't understand that these outcomes, these negative results are simply intrinsic to the nature of sin and sinners are going to be falling into their own pit and beheaded with their own sword and hung on their own gallows like Goliath and Haman.

And God doesn't act in any judgmental way on sin. Sin is its own reward. Sin has its own built-in consequences that just happen because it is the antithesis and the opposite of love.

So all God has to do is love and sin will take care of itself. Sin will be its own punishment. God does not act in any vengeful or retributive or judgmental way.

God is not a God of judgment. God will just leave you to yourself and you'll make yourself miserable. You will judge yourself.

In the negative sense. How does this come about? Think to our passage. What is the value system of the scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, blind guides, and fools? It is the gift on the altar that is important, not the altar itself.

It is the gold within and on the outer decorations of the temple that is important, not the temple. What is Jesus rejoinder to this? What is his rebuke and correction and instruction in righteousness in this regard? Fool and blind. Do you not understand that the gold is significant because it is in the temple that you are deprecating? The sacrifice is significant because it is on the altar that you are deprecating.

And I would submit to you by way of application that Christ Jesus is visible and meaningful and glorified and worthy because he is part and parcel of the entirety of God's word. All of it. Jesus is the sacrifice on the altar and that sacrifice is sanctified by the entirety of where he is found.

Jesus is who Jesus is because he is throughout every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. He is related. We appreciate and understand and come to know the Lord Jesus because of the temple, because of the altar, because of the heaven that sanctify him, that identify him, that particularize him and focus our attention on him.

You cannot ignore the rest of the Bible and only look at the gift or only look at the gold. Fools and blind, do you not understand that it is the context, it is the surrounding temple and altar and heavens that truly sanctify and glorify the Lord Jesus. And you can't get there by skipping that and diminishing it, denigrating it, treating it as of no importance.

I'm not even obligated by the altar. I'm not obligated by the temple. I'm not obligated by the heavens.

I'm only going to pick something associated and I'll consider that important enough to consider it binding when I make a promise and associate myself with that thing. It's the same error, is it not? I'm going to take one part of the larger context and I'm going to particularize and emphasize and prioritize that. I'm going to give that value and not the context that gives it its sanctity, that gives it its importance, that sets in a setting its value.

Misvaluing. This has happened, and it's not just in progressive Christianity. This is the problem with legalism that has haunted both Judaism and Christianity for centuries, is prioritizing external observances.

And this is coming up in the woes in an even more pronounced way than we've already seen it. Prioritizing forms and losing the substance. Prioritizing appearances and formal and external adherence to rules and regulations and embellishing and extending and expanding such rules and regulations at the expense of the truths they were designed to convey and to symbolically reflect.

This is the problem. And by way of application, it's not about swearing an oath and whether or not you keep it. It is about, do you recognize that everything that proceeds from the mouth of God is important? We can be condemned as a Bible church and as Bible-believing Christians of being bibliolaters.

And the charge is, well, you consider every verse the same. And if you go on down in Giles's analysis here, he says, you know, this whole notion, let me read you something. Giles quotes often and is a fellow traveler with a guy named Richard Rohr, R-O-H-R.

And he published a meditation back in 2014 that has been oft quoted. References referenced in the years since. I'm going to read you this because it's short and it's called the Jesus hermeneutic.

This is Richard Rohr, Friday, January 10th, 2014. The Jesus hermeneutic. You deserve to know my science for interpreting sacred texts.

It is called a hermeneutic. Without an honest and declared hermeneutic, we have no consistency or authority in our interpretation of the Bible. My methodology, says Richard, is very simple.

In italics, I will try to interpret scripture the way that Jesus did. Even more than telling us exactly what to see in the scriptures, Jesus taught us how to see and what to emphasize and also what could be de-emphasized or even ignored. This is where I hear the warning music being turned up in the background and red flags are starting to wave all across the horizon in all directions.

Jesus taught us how to even ignore parts of scripture. Is this true? How many times have I said it? Examine the premise of every argument before you start contending with its conclusion. Look at the apotheosis before you ever grant any credence to the apotheosis.

Look at the beginning before you look at the end. And he slips this under the radar. Even more than telling us what to see in the scriptures, Jesus taught us how to see, what to emphasize.

Nothing wrong with that. Didn't Jesus say the law and the prophets are summed up? Emphasize love for God, love for one another. You can fulfill all the law and the prophets if you understand this.

It's coming up in our next woe. What is important? Jesus taught us what is important and also what could be de-emphasized or even ignored. It's that last little scorpion sting that renders the whole thing false.

Jesus did not teach us what could be ignored in scripture. Seriously, if Jesus says man shall not live by bread alone, quoting the Old Testament, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, every word, is Jesus saying, well, live by the most important words and you can ignore some of the others. This is Satan's own lie.

Jesus, he goes on to say, is himself our hermeneutic. And he was in no way a fundamentalist or literalist. Seriously, what do you mean by fundamentalist? What do you mean by literalist? If you define those in certain ways, you can say, well, Jesus wasn't a fightin' fundie.

He wasn't a legalistic, you know, thunder-invoking Baptist who is making the same mistake as the Pharisees. I pick on the Baptists because I was one. Jesus was not a literalist.

Have you heard Jesus quoting the Psalms on the cross? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me? I look down, I can see all my bones, those who compass me about, et cetera. Not literal? What do you mean by literalist? You're wouldn'tly incapable of understanding anticipation or symbolism or metaphor, figures of speech and so on. What do you mean by literalist? This is something with which you can't contend because it's so vague.

And vagueness is one of Satan's chief tools. This is how he got Eve to eat the fruit. Has God not said? It's vague.

Jesus is himself our hermeneutic. He was in no way a fundamentalist. He was in no way a literalist.

That is patently untrue. Jesus was in many ways fundamental. How do you think the law of love gets stated? Because it's fundamental to understanding what the law is about.

He was a man of the spirit, capital S. Just watch him and watch how he does it, parentheses, which means you must have some knowledge of his scriptures, the red ink. New paragraph. Jesus consistently ignored or even denied exclusionary, punitive, and triumphalistic texts in his own Jewish Bible in favor of texts that emphasized inclusion, mercy, and justice for the oppressed.

Twisted truth. Did Jesus often quote scriptures that emphasized mercy and justice for the

oppressed? That part of it is true. Did Jesus emphasize inclusion gotta be careful, including what? Did Jesus emphasize scriptures that were inclusionary for Baal worshippers or Molech child sacrificing Canaanite-ish religion followers? What kind of inclusion are you talking about? If you're talking about the poor and the widows and the orphans in Israel, include them in provision and so on.

Okay. But this is including just enough truth to sugarcoat the lie. Now, let me read this again.

Listen to each word. Jesus consistently ignored or even denied ignored or denied scripture, Old Testament scripture that these people deem exclusionary, punitive, or triumphalistic. Combination of vagueness, inaccuracy, and exaggeration.

Consistently denied. Do you remember Jesus talking about how the men of, woe to you, Chorazin and Bethsaida, if the mighty works that have been done in you had been done in Old Testament days and Old Testament locations, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. Woe to you, Queen of Sheba.

As a counterexample, she's going to rise up in the judgment. Remember? Did he consistently ignore punitive texts? This is poison in the pot. You got a pot of stew.

How much poison does it take to render that stuff deadly? It's mostly stew. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. Let me read this one more time.

And you watch for this. My exhortation, my encouragement, my great desire and hope for all of us is, do not let this kind of sneaky perversion pass the gates. Jesus consistently ignored or even denied exclusionary, punitive, and triumphalistic texts in his own Jewish Bible in favor of texts that emphasized inclusion, mercy, and justice for the oppressed.

Jesus in his first advent is the suffering servant, and he is here to proclaim and to embody and to demonstrate the love of God. This is one of many attributes of God. This is grace before judgment.

But John 5, 22, red ink. Furthermore, the father judges no one, but has assigned all judgment to the son. Judgment has been entrusted to the son.

Jesus is not in judgment mode in the first coming. He is the one who submits himself to judgment on our behalf. But there is another coming, and God is not two-dimensional.

He is not height and breadth of love alone. He is righteousness. He is justice.

Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord. I'm going to stand back and let sin perpetrate its own consequences.

And by the way, how do you think those consequences come about? Why do you think sin ends up in death? Why do you think there's a way that seems right, but the ends

thereof are the ways of death? Who presides over this universe? Who presides over the world, fallen though it is? Who has allowed Satan to be the ruler of this age and the ruler of this world? Who do you think allows the function of principalities and powers and rulers of darkness? By whose authority and by whose patient toleration do these conditions prevail in the world? First place, why does sin eventuate in consequences? It's by the will and the purpose of God himself. You can't get God off the hook for the wages of sin being death. Anyway, this is poison on a stick.

But this is a short devotional, and let me just conclude it. Jesus had a deeper and wider eye that knew what passages were creating a highway for God and which passages were merely cultural, self-serving and legalistic additions. When Christians state that every line in the Bible is of equal importance and inspiration, they are being very unlike Jesus.

I cannot tell you how prevalent this view has become in the last decade. His final couple of lines in italics, Jesus read the inspired text in an inspired way. The text is only inspired in spots.

And I, Richard Rohrer, I, Keith Giles, I fill in your progressive proponent, and I mentioned their names because they are often quoted. I mentioned their names. I don't like to call out people by name, but if you want to investigate this, this is where you start.

They are not alone in this, but they are leaders. They have outed themselves. They have made themselves prominent.

They have published books. Richard Rohrer had a book that came out after he did this devotional. Giles is the author of those seven books, you know, Jesus Untangled, Jesus This and That.

And because they have made themselves prominent, I am willing to call them out for this error. Jesus read the inspired text in an inspired way, parentheses, therefore so can I. And I can judge other believers for their patriotism, for their dedication to the whole Bible, for their, I can render judgment. I can say that they are flies attracted to fertilizer, where I am a honeybee who produces and loves honey.

And there's graphic memes out there about this, that the bees are frustrated because those of us who are, in their view, stuck with the fertilizer taste can't be helped. The bee can extol the virtues of the honey, but the fly is never gonna understand it. This has been published in just the last week about you and about me.

I am here to tell you, Jesus said, they hated me, they're gonna hate you. And this is how. And a man's enemies are gonna be the members of his own household.

This is a movement from within the church. This is a cancerous tumor that has grown within the faith. This is not an atheist attack.

These are blood-bought believers who, as it says later on in the New Testament, even deny the Lord who bought them. They deny that there was a purchase at all. They deny the atonement.

So in our passage, how can you get to this blind, foolish stage? Bad values. You do not value everything that comes from God. It is the temple and the gold.

It is the sacrifice and the altar. It is heaven and the God who dwells there. And to minimize and devalue any of those and consider them of no weight, I can swear by those and it means nothing, because they are not important.

This is the path to destruction. It begins up above. It begins in those single-digit verses in this chapter.

When you start down the road of self-importance, I've got education. I've got status. I publish books.

My name is known. Therefore, what I say, I am qualified to determine what is inspired and what is not, what is important and what is not. Danger, danger, danger.

Jesus said, if you want to avoid getting into this deep of a pit, don't start with self-importance. Don't start with a need for appreciation, a need for recognition. A need to be seen by men.

That reward turns to ashes in the mouth. And not only does it result in its own consequences of unhappiness and fruitlessness, being a dead branch in the vine, but there is judgment, active judgment coming from God in heaven. God doesn't just leave you alone to suffer the consequences.

There is judgment coming. And Jesus is going to talk about it as we proceed through this chapter. We're at a good stopping place for this morning.

It is a warning. There's no cheerful way to end, except that as Paul says, we are convinced of better things of you, brethren, things that pertain to godliness, things that accompany salvation. We are saved.

We have the Holy Spirit. We pray Psalm 51 daily, hourly, if need be. Father in heaven, show me my hidden faults, purge me, cleanse me.

This is the key. Go back to the Beatitudes for encouragement. When you get depressed looking at this, go back to chapter five.

God resists the proud. God gives grace to the humble, cultivate humility, teachability, malleability, improvability, recognizing that we can't do it ourselves, but I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for its power to convict, to convert, to cleanse, to renew, to enable us to put a sanctified offering of ourselves on the altar before you. We pray that as we reflect on these things, that your Holy Spirit will help us to see their individual pertinence in our circumstances, in our relationships, in our daily dealings, so that we can truly represent the Lord Jesus Christ as his body at this time, in this age, and let a light shine in the midst of an increasingly crooked and perverse and dark time. We ask it in Jesus name.

Amen.