

Matthew 22-02-13a

This is February the 13th, 2022. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. We're in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 23, looking at Jesus' words to the Pharisees, the seven woes that we find detailed here.

And our objective is not only to join in recognizing the failures that the Pharisees perpetrated, but to understand the analogous behavior that they represent and identify its modern counterpart and avoid it like the plague in our own lives. So we want to not only understand what Jesus is specifically saying to them, but turn the corner into being warned and being made aware that it is blindness that is behind these practices and these attitudes. And the problem with blindness is you can't see.

So we hope that the words of the Lord Jesus will illuminate our hearts and enable us to see so that we can be as far as possible from joining the Pharisees in any of these failures and bad practices. That's our goal. We're gonna ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and then get started.

Father, we're so grateful for another time of fellowship, of sharing our enthusiasm with each other for our salvation, for our savior, for the relationship that we have with you through him, the wonderful privileges that we enjoy, the grace that has been bestowed on us, the provision that has been made for us, the plan and purpose into which we have been integrated and included. And we pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that your Holy Spirit will help us in every way to understand, to discern, and to put into application these wonderful truths from the lips of the Lord Jesus. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Matthew chapter 23, woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites. You shut up the kingdom of heaven against men in verse 13. You neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you travel land and sea, verse 15, to win one proselyte. And when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Verse 16, the third woe.

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. Fools and blind, which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctified, past tense, the gold. Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obligated.

Fools and blind, which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies, present tense, 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 dwelt in it, past tense.

He who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by him who sits on it. This is where we pick up this morning, just a few concluding thoughts about the third of these seven condemnations, these charges from the lips of the Lord Jesus. The tenses are important.

The gold was sanctified at the point that it was integrated into the temple furnishings, accouterments, decorations, and so on. So sanctified is an heiress. It happened in the past.

The gold was sanctified at that point and it remains sanctified. I suppose once the temple was destroyed and the gold was carried off, it lost its sanctification. The sanctification of that gold is tied to its application, use, and presence in the temple itself.

Before it was in the temple, not sanctified. After it leaves the temple, not sanctified. But during its time of association, it is connected to the worship of God and is therefore sanctified.

The gift isn't sanctified before it comes to the altar, but gifts that are brought to the altar continue to be sanctified as they are brought. And while Jesus doesn't say a lot about how valuable, hallowed, or glorious the temple is, because the presence of God never actually inhabited this temple the way it did the tabernacle or Solomon's. And so this past tense idea may actually reach back to Solomon's temple more so than the one that is standing in Jerusalem in this day.

But notice that when gifts are brought, this is present tense, which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies. Gifts that are brought before God are sanctified because they are brought and presented to God and God considers them sanctified. And this is a wonderful principle that we're gonna look at more here shortly.

But as he continues, and he says, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by all things on it, all things on it. And really the altar is the place of offering, the place of communion, the place of contact with returning thanks. I remember when I was a child, my dad used to talk about asking the blessing for a meal at the table by saying, if he was gonna ask someone else to do it, or he would say, let's return thanks.

And I always thought that was a quaint and perhaps old fashioned phrase to return thanks. But it is a response to what God has done for us is that we try to return to him a representative portion of what he has blessed us with. This is the principle behind first fruits and so on.

Again, we'll be looking at this in a little bit more applicational value shortly. But then in verse 21, he who swears by the temple, he's already reiterated the relationship between the altar and the gift that is on it. And so if he's gonna reiterate the temple, you would expect he would talk about the gold, that he who swears by the temple swears by it and

the gold that decorates it, but he turns it and he changes it because the Pharisees view would be that the most valuable thing in the temple is the gold, but Jesus view is the most valuable thing in the temple ideally is God himself.

And this is another case where their values are off and it's very subtle. You can read through this and kind of miss that change just as the Pharisees missed it. What makes the temple valuable? The fact that it's got a lot of gold inside or does the gold in the temple reflect the glory of God who ideally resides within it? He who swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwelt, past tense.

And Jesus is very careful with his tenses. And I'm sure that when he delivered this, no doubt in Aramaic, he was equally careful to make this a past tense because God does not currently dwell there. But as a memorial and as a location and as a place to come and for those who value the God who has placed his name among his people and in Jerusalem and formerly at this site where the temple now sits, that's what is in the heart of a true worshiper.

They don't care if it's an altar of uncut stones or if it is an altar surrounded by all of the beauty and adornment that Herod's temple represented. And he moves on to add a third comparison that isn't even considered. And this is tragic that the Pharisees did not distinguish where the actual dwelling place of God is.

He who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits on it. Jesus is careful to tell us that we shouldn't actually need to swear oaths. Let your yea be yea and your nay be nay.

But oaths are recognized in the law of Moses. They are still in the age of the law at this point. So if someone is going to swear, they should really think carefully about the basis upon which they are planning to make and keep this oath.

What is the backing? When you write a check and you put some numbers on it and sign someone's name in the pay to line, and then you put your signature on it, you are essentially making a promise. If you take this piece of paper and treat it properly, you're going to end up with some of my money in your hands, in your account, in your wherewithal. It's a promise.

The check itself doesn't have value. It's the bank and bank account upon which it is drawn where the value resides. And in the same way, an oath in and of itself doesn't have value.

It is how much integrity and how much value lies behind that promise. And the idea in swearing an oath in Old Testament Israel, in Old Testament times, was there is more than just the words issuing forth from my mouth in this promise. This is guaranteed because of the God I worship and serve, because of the wherewithal that I am promising

and its source.

So this first set of three oaths then brought us to the fourth, which begins our study this morning in verse 23. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone.

This brings up all kinds of distracting issues like the issue of tithing. Should people still tithe today? Because Jesus says you should not have left off the tithing of spices. But what is really going on here? The same target audience is in view, the scribes, the Pharisees, hypocrites.

There might have been some genuinely faithful and dedicated men of faith in the ranks of the Pharisees among the scribes, but when Jesus adds hypocrites, this specifies that he is talking to the hypocritical Pharisees and the hypocritical scribes and so on throughout this entire series. And it is helpful, I think, to recognize sometimes that it may not be us under attack from those who accuse. We've talked in recent days about the progressive Christian movement and they have formed as a reaction against abuses in churches, particularly legalistic churches, excessively fundamental churches, churches where the word of God is not really active in the hearts and minds of people.

And there is a lot of insensitivity, mistreatment, misuse of the Bible to gain control, to achieve purposes that have nothing to do with God. And it is helpful to recognize that as Jesus attaches the adjectives, hypocrites, fools, blind guides, you could be a Pharisee and not fall under this condemnation and it would be wrong, it would be a mistake and it would be a distraction to take on board the criticism as though it does attach to you if it doesn't. There's a lot of widespread criticism of Christianity in general, denominational Christianity in particular, Bible churches are under attack for bibliolatry and so on.

And those criticisms have traction where they apply, but we can almost get a rebound effect, a backlash effect when those criticisms are valid in so many places and we then personalize them when they may not apply to us. It's important to take on board criticisms that are applicable. We can examine ourselves to see, am I a hypocrite? Am I a blind guide? Am I being foolish? Am I confusing my values the way these hypocritical Pharisees and scribes did? And am I making a game out of my religious faith? Well, Simon says, I'll keep my promise.

Oh, I didn't say Simon says, I didn't say the gold in the temple. So my promise that where I swore by the temple has no value whatsoever. People who do that are rightly criticized, rightly judged and are coming under the righteous condemnation of God.

If we are not guilty of those things, it is a distraction to try to go refute or oppose or otherwise engage in dialogue about those criticisms. Where they apply, let them apply. But we should focus on finding the criticisms that do apply to us.

So as we look at, let's take a look at these first three woes. There are seven and we're coming to the center here. But in the first three woes, we've examined their details.

We've looked at what they mean and what they meant in Jesus' day. What do they mean to us? The first one, woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites. You shut up the kingdom of heaven against men.

You don't go in yourselves and you don't allow others to go in. What would be the analog? How could one be guilty of that today? Well, let's take the kingdom of God, whatever our understanding is of its present form and its future form, but certainly entering the kingdom of God, whether it is the preview mode that we enjoy, these wonderful spiritual blessings of the presence of Christ and the power of God through the Holy Spirit and his word. The kingdom of God loosely represents all of these wonderful benefits and blessings that come from a proper, right relationship with God and with the people of God.

So how could we block that? How could you and I be an obstacle or an impediment to someone coming to that relationship with God, coming to that fellowship with God and with believers who understand the genuine values and the genuine priorities that Jesus is talking about? How could we do that? I would suggest a couple of ways. First of all, our conversation, our manner of life, what near at hand observers see as priorities and objectives in our lives. We are not an island.

We don't live unto ourselves. We're not invisible. And the things that we do not only affect our own path now and in the ages to come, but by their visibility and by the attachments and associations that we have influence others.

And if we, in our conversation, emphasize certain things, if we pursue certain things, if we are overly political, if we are overly social in terms of social justice, and here are the problems in society, if we're overly subjective in constantly focusing on what is wrong and what needs fixing, as you can see an example with the scribes and the Pharisees constantly finding fault with the tax collectors, the sinners, the prostitutes, the here's what's wrong in our society. To the extent that God is not blessing us, it's these people's fault. And talking about that, representing that, emphasizing it without having taken a step of first looking inward and ensuring that whatever boards and beams one has in his own eye, are not blinding him before attempting to take out moats elsewhere.

I think this is a way that a lot of modern Christians fail, and we do not want to perpetrate that failure ourselves. We have to, first of all, examine ourselves. We've already seen Jesus talking about the beam and the moat and it would be a helpful reflex, is every time we prepare to criticize, every time we prepare to render a judgment or offer a negative opinion about something, to first of all, check for hypocrisy, check for adherence and affirmation of those things within our own fence line, inside our own walls, within our own hearts, and to be reticent, to be conservative about what we end up having as the

substance of our conversation.

Because the scribes and Pharisees did a lot of talking. They perpetrated this shutting out from the kingdom for themselves and from others through verbiage. It was their communication and that outed itself in their practice, which Jesus details here in some of these subsequent woes.

But this first woe is something of a summary by focusing on these faulty values and these false priorities and these bad goals. All of this creates a stumbling block for people who are trying to find the kingdom of God and enter it, trying to find God and enter into relationship with Him. And it is a helpful goal.

It is a good value and it ought to be one of our priorities to not attempt to correct every single thing we see that doesn't line up with our ideas of what is vertical and horizontal, what is plumb, what is level. This is not ideal. This shouldn't be the way it is.

But by constantly talking about what is wrong or who is wrong, it takes up space. It sucks air out of the room that could be used to focus on the things that are positive. You remember our memory verse from some years back, whatsoever things are true, noble, lovely, honorable, of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.

We live in such a condemnatory environment, such a social culture of condemnation and cancellation. And one of the ways that we can distinguish ourselves as people of hope, of such hope and positivity that people will ask us how we can be so cheerful in such a rotten world. And we can give an answer to those who ask us a reason for that hope is to not join in this kind of talk that really doesn't accomplish anything.

It doesn't provide a solution. It doesn't help one avoid falling into a similar quagmire. It just takes up space.

There are so few of us as believers that are equipped to actually inject divine truth into observations, into discussions, into viewpoint, into attitude, that if we have the opportunity to gently and without a lot of confrontation or a lot of negative judgments to express, when we see the things that Jesus is condemning in the woes, we can go back and affirm the things that he says in the Beatitudes. We can offer a positive counterweight and counterbalance to all of the negativity that is just circulating and spiraling downward in the world. So by doing so, the opposite of blocking the way to the kingdom and the opposite of not entering in ourselves is to celebrate what the kingdom is and how to get there and the blessings and opportunities that it offers.

And to be people who represent the positive side and the benefits of being connected to God and enjoying his grace, having his power enter into our lives and give us endurance, give us the fruit of the spirit, that is getting to be a very scarce commodity. There may

be supply chain issues and there may be truckers on strike and the rest of it, but the real dearth of supply is divine truth and the fruit of the spirit. That's what is lacking.

That's what we can offer in lieu of blocking access to the kingdom. So that's a thought on avoiding coming under that first condemnation from the Lord Jesus. The second one, you travel land and sea to win one proselyte.

When he is won in verse 15, you make him twice as much a son of Gehenna as yourselves. This is club building. This is consensus making.

I want to surround myself with people who think like I do. If there's young people, I want to bring them on board to my point of view. I want to recruit.

I want to add to my club. I want to convince. If you find a proselyte, what are you doing? You're trying to convert them to your point of view.

And when they start seeing things the way you do, then you want to fill them in. You want to give them a daily dose of the viewpoint and reinforce it and build on it and flesh it out and increase it so much so that they will take on that kind of negative momentum and begin to do it themselves. And again, you see this all around us in the world today.

You see it in the Christian world. And the reason Paul has to call out the Corinthians for there being wars and divisions among you is that people were not only, I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, or I am of Christ, but these factions were trying to recruit and trying to pull others in so that they could gain a majority and have the influence to guide the direction of their entire group. And the efforts that people are making today to recruit for viewpoint and to add to their numbers and consolidate their followers is bad in a couple of ways.

First of all, many of these viewpoints are not informed by the word of God, the truth of God, the plan and purpose of God, the Lord Jesus himself. And even those who claim to the I am of Christ crowd, Paul condemns. That one really surprised me when we went through Corinthians and I was trying to figure it out.

And I thought, the more you think about this, how can you go wrong being of Christ? Aren't we Christians? Isn't this the whole goal to be my disciple, follow me and by this shall all men know that you're my disciples, that you love one another. How can it be wrong to be of Christ? And I think it is the narrowness. Pharisees had no use for other factions, other viewpoints.

It is the early form of denominationalism, but you can even make a denomination out of being non-denominational. And you say, well, here's all the things that distinguish us from these others. I want to proselyte you.

I want to bring you over to our point of view. This is the way we look at the plan and

purpose of God. We grounded in scripture and there is a danger of carrying a Bible around and thinking that because I've heard a lot of Bible teaching, I am therefore healthy.

And you can say, I am of Christ. The question is, if you're really of Christ, you won't say that. This I think is the key to understanding that particular faction.

If you really are of Christ, you won't go around saying, I am of Christ. As soon as you say it, it's like saying, I'm humble. I think my primary virtue is my humility.

As soon as you say it, you've betrayed the fact that it's not true. And to proselyte to the, I am of the Jesus hermeneutic or I am of the progressive understanding where the spirit guides what I decide is true and what is not in scripture. As soon as you say, I am of the spirit, as soon as you say, I am of Jesus and I am a Jesus follower, as soon as you say that, you've become an un-Jesus follower.

Jesus didn't say, call yourself a Jesus follower. What did he say? Follow me. And proselyting, recruiting for a viewpoint instead of following it and becoming a great advocate for it by example is to fall under this second woe.

You cannot recruit by overt means to truth, to faith, to the way and to Jesus himself. It doesn't come by recruiting. Proselytizing will make people two-fold the child of hell that the recruiter is and recruiting is to be a son of hell.

We should be ready to answer. Our lives should draw. The glory of God should shine and be its own thing rather than us being formal badge wearing representatives of a thing and as soon as we put a label on ourselves, as soon as we go out and say, well, you know, what Christianity really needs is a return to the Bible church movement.

What Christianity really needs today is to study verse by verse or to do this or to do that and I'm gonna go forth and I'm gonna impose this solution on the problem. That's proselytizing and if we engage in that, we are going to fall under this condemnation. Reform, improvement, genuine discipleship, genuine representation of the Lord Jesus Christ as his body on this earth doesn't get better if we decide to go recruit for it.

The only genuine way to recruit is to be, not to tell somebody else how they should be. We've got our hands full with, I've got my hands full with the SAM project. The SAM project, trying to follow God's blueprint, trying to use God's building materials, trying to let God's power energize that whole enterprise.

That's full time. I cannot go fix other people and you can't fix a movement. You can't fix a viewpoint.

Life is all ultimately lived by individuals and to group people and say this group has a problem. If the group had a single mind that you could go convert and convince, that

would be one thing. But a grouping is just a convenient way to talk about a problem that is shared by many individuals and we're gonna see that in Jesus here because he is talking about groups, right? Scribes, Pharisees, those who are hypocrites.

He's addressing them as a group, but we're gonna get there just quickly. Take a look at verse 26. What are the first two words? Blind Pharisee, you first cleanse the inside of the dish.

And Jesus is gonna move this from the group application to the individual. Blind Pharisee is singular because here's what an individual can do. And you will notice that there is a corner that is turned.

When Jesus says, "'You shut up the kingdom of heaven against men. "'You neither go in yourselves "'or allow others who are entering to go in.'" In verse 13, does he offer an alternative? Does he give the solution? He gives a great description of the problem and the grounds for the charge, the accusation of hypocrisy and of being foolish and being blind, right? But he doesn't say, he doesn't tell them, here's how you can fix that. When he says, you canvass the earth to get a proselyte, make him twofold a child of Gehenna that you are, does he give the way to fix that? He doesn't.

You could assume there's something by implication like stop doing that, but he doesn't formalize it. He doesn't state it. He doesn't denote it.

It may be connoted, but he doesn't say it. You get to our third one, blind guides. And he says, when you swear, this is what's really happening.

But he doesn't say stop swearing. He doesn't say start swearing by the altar instead of the sacrifice on the altar. Start swearing by the temple instead of the gold that's in the temple.

Start swearing by the throne of God instead of just heaven itself. He doesn't say any of that, does he? But when we get to this fourth woe, you pay tithe, mint, and cumin, and you neglect the weight of your matters. He now says, these you ought to have done.

These you ought to have done. He is transitioning into here's what you have not done. Here's what you ought to have done.

And he's eventually going to get to here's what you should do. First cleanse in the fifth woe. There is conviction of sin.

Here's what you should have done that you're not doing. And after that comes, here's what you should do. Conviction comes first, personal conviction.

And then there is an individual solution, blind Pharisee first cleanse. This is what we want to watch for. It is so easy to inadvertently become a blind guide.

What does a guide do? When you go to a museum, you go to a battlefield, you go to something that needs looking at, take a cave tour, you've got a guide, and usually it's a group. It's usually, you know, any place I've been, you very rarely get, unless it's a slow day, you don't get a guide that is only taking you, the guide wants to take the group through or individuals over and over and over again. And instead of being a blind guide, Jesus never says anything in here about becoming a sighted guide.

He doesn't say, if you will fix this blindness problem, now you can guide the masses. Jesus doesn't encourage guiding. He encourages fixing ourselves individually and being examples.

What does Paul say? Follow my example, do what I do, do what Christ did. Christ is our example. But to exhort groups is an easy way to neglect what needs doing individually, to criticize, to find fault with movements and groups and opinions and so on is easy because the more time I spend looking outward, the less time I spend looking inward.

I would rather proselytize and guide these on the outside than find the boards that are obstructing my view on the inside. So by way of application, as we look at these woes, we wanna ask ourselves, is there some way, shape or form in which I am causing this same kind of problem where I am being hypocritical in claiming to espouse righteousness and yet perpetrating evil? And how can I fix it? Me individually, I don't need to worry about that guy over there. I don't need to worry about that group over there, that movement over there.

I don't need to go try to get on a blog and influence all of this person's followers to think differently or see the flaws and the heinous errors that are being made. I need to make sure I am not perpetrating the same kind of error. I need to fix myself and let God use me in ways that he sees fit, whether they are inscrutable or inscrutable to me to be fit, sanctified and worthy of use and not make my goal and priority to go fix that over there.

This is the primary issue that threads all the way through these woes to the Pharisees. Well, we're gonna pick up here at this very interesting fourth woe in verse 23 and 24 and move into the final set of three when we come back from the break.