

Matthew 22-02-20a

This is the 20th day of February, 2022, fun to write. And we're here at Grace Truth Bible Church on a beautiful Sunday morning, ready to continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew. Picking up in chapter 23, we've been looking at the seven woes that Jesus really concludes his public ministry with in terms of the description of his present day, the religious leadership of the time.

And we're going to be moving into chapter 24 and 25, which is prophetic and looking to the future. But this is a fascinating look at the failures of those who thought they were religious, who believed themselves to be on the path to blessing and righteousness. And as one who hopes to be somewhere in the vicinity of that path, we take this as a warning to be carefully examined and then examine ourselves in its light.

We're going to see some very interesting parallels this morning, because this is not the only place and not the only time that Jesus talks about these particular facets of the religious and spiritual leadership. And the comparison is very fruitful for helping us to understand the vocabulary that he uses here in our passage. So let's take a moment to ask God's blessing, ensure that our hearts are prepared and that our minds are attuned to the words of the Lord Jesus, and then we'll begin.

Father, we are so grateful for another opportunity to spend time together, to grow in grace and knowledge of the Savior through listening to his teaching on this earth. When you sent him the first time to confront the people of Israel, and we find so much fruitful grounds for reflection and meditation and application in our own lives, we pray that as we go through this section of your Word that the Holy Spirit will enable us to see how pertinent and applicable it is for us, and that we can see clearly that we will not be blind as these were, that we will have the humility and the teachability to benefit from this wonderful teaching section by the Lord Jesus, and as a result be useful in service and function both now and in ages to come. I ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. As we look together at this section of Matthew chapter 23, we've seen the first three woes in great detail, and we know that verse 14 is not there, and it leads us to count verses 16 through 22 as the third imprecation, you might say, looking at the clever but unsound reasoning that was behind their oaths. I think a lot of people think that this is about swearing and whether your yea should be yea and your nay should be nay, but it is really about values.

It is about goals. It is about priorities and how they are reflected in this kind of swearing of oaths, giving of pledges, and if you think back to keep your finger here and turn back to Matthew chapter 5, Jesus has already called out the unfortunate habit of swearing and giving pledges in this way. When he says in verse 33, you have heard it was said of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.

Matthew 5, 34, but I say to you, do not swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is His footstool, nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Of course, it is in reality, the great King speaking on this occasion, nor shall you swear by your head because you cannot make one hair white or black. There's been some modification to the ability to do so in the modern day, but the truth is you can only superficially change appearance.

And Jesus has a lot to say about superficial appearance in our context. Let your yes be yes, and your no, no. Whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Let your yes be yes, and your no be no. In the context of this giving of oaths or making promises, it should simply be that our word is our bond. What we say, we will do.

We have credibility. We have accountability. We are trustworthy.

We represent faithfulness. And as the representatives of the Lord Jesus on this earth, as His body, one of the tragic results in the modern day is that Christians are not famously trustworthy. They are not famously tellers of truth.

There is scandal. There is hedging. There is a lot of distraction and deflection, and wearing a badge or a label as Christian, and yet being no better than the rest of the world.

It's just more of a club and a convenient social association. And sadly, it is in and among those who are prominent, those who are in social visibility, claiming to represent Christ, and then running off with their secretary, et cetera. And the name of has greatly suffered, and the cause of Christ has suffered, because believers lack integrity.

Those who claim the name Christian do not function with integrity. And the more you protest your fidelity, your trustworthiness, and so on, the less trustworthy you typically are. You should simply be able to say, I will do this.

I will be there. I will fulfill this obligation, and that should be enough. So Jesus has already talked about oath giving, but here the question is, which is greater? And this is emphasizing minor, easy things at the expense of more difficult, more important things.

There is form without substance. There is a superficiality and a hypocrisy here that Jesus calls out. We saw that in great detail.

And moving to the fourth woe in verse 23, woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, you pay tithe of these garden spices. We're going to see a little bit more about this in a moment. And have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faith.

These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone. There are two really important statements in the middle of this section of condemnation. One is a statement

of what ought to be, that isn't.

And the second is an imperative. When he talks about the shutting up of the kingdom, he doesn't say, stop shutting the kingdom and start letting other people in, help them to get in. It is simply a condemnation.

He says, this is what you are doing. And he doesn't give a remedy. He doesn't give a counter emphasis at all.

Same thing in the second, traveling land and sea to make proselytes. He doesn't say stop making proselytes or change your system. You're winning converts to your system of thinking, your theology, your tradition instead of to God.

He doesn't give the counter to it. Same thing in the third. He doesn't say, he's already said chapters earlier in this book, let your yea be yea and your nay be nay.

But he doesn't say that here. When you get to the fourth woe, he says, you are majoring in these minor, easy to do things. And you ought to be paying attention to the weightier matters of the law, which he then identifies.

Now, this morning, when we come to the fifth woe in chapter 23, verse 25, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence and or unrighteousness. You can check your text note down at the bottom, but we're going to see that, that either one will do in this case momentarily, outside of the cup, clean inside of the cup, full of heinous things. Then in verse 26, and we began to look at this last time, blind Pharisee singular.

And over and over again, Jesus has been calling them out for blindness, blind guides in verse 16, fools and blind in verse 17, fools and blind in verse 19. And again, blind Pharisee here in verse 24 and in verse 26, blind guides, blind Pharisee, blind, blind, blind, blind. This, the difficulty with blindness is that so often we are blind to our blindness and unwilling to check for it.

Blind Pharisee singular first cleanse the inside of the cup. And this is the first time Jesus has said, not only is this what you're doing, not only is there something you ought to be doing that you're not, but here is what you must do. Blind Pharisee first cleanse.

And I said last week, really, this would be a great sticker to put on our mirror, on our great verse to have before our eyes on a daily basis. First cleanse. It is so easy to sharpshoot.

It's easy to be critical and be disappointed and disgusted at the things that go on in the world around us. And 99% of those things, we have no influence control. We don't even have a vote.

Many things are happening as the result of efforts of people who aren't even elected. And we, there's nothing we can do about that, but here's one thing we can do. We do have sovereignty in our own hearts and minds.

We do have control. We have the ability to affect change and seek transformation. So Jesus says, blind Pharisee first cleanse yourself first cleanse your heart.

And God has provided the means of cleansing. We saw in Zachariah that at the second coming of Christ, a fountain for cleansing is going to be open for those who receive the spirit of grace and supplication over in Zachariah chapter 13 and 14. First cleanse.

Cleansing is essential. It is akin to looking for lumber in our eye before we try to cast out moats. But this is something we are instinctively and congenitally inclined not to do.

A good gut check for whether we are inclined to look for change of mind and forgiveness is to think about the relationship between love for God and love for one another. If you think back over recent conversations, recent interactions, recent days, and ask, when is the last time I said to someone, I'm sorry? When is the last time we examined ourselves and realized that we fell short? We inflicted an injury or an injustice on someone around us. And by examining ourselves, we say, you know, those words were unkind.

That action was wrong. That omission was insensitive. And the nature to recognize that I myself have done wrong will reflect itself in the horizontal by occasionally when it is called for and when it is heartfelt, when we mean it to go to someone and say, that was wrong.

I am sorry. If we don't find ourselves ever saying, you know, I messed that up and I'm sorry. It is not going to be happening in the vertical either.

The two are tied together in the same way that love for God and love for one another is tied together. So is the acknowledgement of wrongdoing and the need for forgiveness. This is the proper interpretation of the verse that says, confess your faults one to another.

This doesn't mean stand up in a church service and tell everybody your sins. It means that when we are at fault, and we saw this earlier, when Jesus said, if your brother has aught against you, go and be reconciled. He has aught against you.

You have wronged him in some way, go be reconciled, confess your fault. If there's not confession, and this is a dashboard light. If you just say, you know, I don't think I've done anybody any wrong and I don't have the need to apologize.

I've, I've been pretty much steering a perfect course. Listen to yourself, say that. I've basically been perfect in all of my horizontal dealings, all of my conversations, all of my sensitivities, my fulfillment of my promises, my obligations, the things that I have said I

would do.

And if we never find ourselves recognizing that we have fallen short in the horizontal, I promise you there is no meaningful confession of sin going on in the vertical. And that's a big spiritual problem. Fools and blind cleanse the inside of the dish.

How do we do that? We do not have the water. We do not have the soap. We do not have the wherewithal.

This comes from God. There is cleansing, a fountain of cleansing available to us in the spiritual sense, just as there will one day be in the literal sense. Again, as we saw in Zachariah, you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish.

I present myself as faultless, unbesmirched, inside full of extortion and self-indulgence, blind Pharisee. Now, how could Jesus say this? Could there have been some Pharisees that really had the inside of the dish clean? We had a memory verse, but we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away, carried away. We are all as an unclean thing.

Anyone who thinks they have been faultlessly interacting with God and man is blind. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse. Well, this is so interesting.

The woes that we have seen here really kind of come in pairs. The first two are the effect on other people. You shut up the kingdom and you pervert people into your system rather than shining the light, reflecting the light of God.

These first two are the ill effects of a false system of behavior, a false system of worship, a false system of religion. The second two, the third and the fourth, are example. This is the image I bear before men.

Instead of reflecting the image of Christ, instead of being those who are worthy to be asked a reason for hope and of confidence, of the assurance and faithfulness that ought to characterize the people of God, the example is bad. The first one is sort of teaching and representation of God in the doctrinal realm. The second is personal behavior.

And here in the third group, as you begin the fifth and sixth woes here, this hypocrisy is what is on the inside versus what is on the outside. And this is actually the formal charge of hypocrisy, saying one thing and doing another, appearing one way and being another. And these have been moving inward from here's what you say by way of teaching, talking about what the kingdom is and isn't, and recruiting people into your system of philosophy and system of thinking, whether it's political, social, spiritual, then moving to the example, the behavior, and then here centering on the heart.

So it starts at the outside and moves ever inward. And now Jesus is going to talk about

the heart and what is in the inmost being. So the inside of the dish is corrupt.

In the sixth woe, verse 27, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead bones and all uncleanness. Started out with a dish, which can be a useful thing. If you have a clean dish inside and out, it's a useful dish, but a tomb is not a part of life.

A tomb is a place of death. It is a memorial and a reminder that somebody died and you can't make living use beyond stopping by to review your fond memories of someone who's departed. But you can see where a dish can be made useful by cleansing it for life.

You can't clean a tomb and have that somehow be a useful dwelling. Remember the demon-possessed men in the Gadarene, Gerasene, Gergesene, Legion story. Those demon-possessed men lived in the graveyard, lived in the tombs.

That's not something you can fix. So this is an increasing intensity of condemnation. Whitewashed tombs appear beautiful outwardly.

And they had this tradition, you may have read about it. I think Edersheim talks about it, where it's just like in the modern time. And I do mean modern as opposed to postmodern.

It used to be decoration day, still on Memorial Day and such people would go to especially the graves of veterans and so on, put out flags and refresh the flowers and such that are at graves in memoriam. In the ancient day, they would actually go to the tombs and whitewash them to express the same kind of idea. They didn't have a lot of cut flowers and there's a whole industry of providing decorations for grave sites now.

You can get urns and plastic flowers that last a long time and banners and all kinds of things to place there to express appreciation for those who have departed. But Jesus uses this practice to point out the disparity between the outward appearance that Pharisees and scribes cultivated and their inner problem. Even so, verse 28, outwardly you appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

These who claim to be experts and diligent about keeping the law inside, Jesus says, you are anomia, you are lawless. You have all the outside trappings. And it's a hard thing to look at a passage that talks about hypocrisy because we like to think, well, I'm not a hypocrite.

And in many cases, we are not. And we say, well, this is not my particular problem. Boo on the hypocrites.

Let's move on to something more useful and more applicational. Well, if you keep your place here and look at Luke chapter 11, beginning at verse 37, we have a parallel here that is going to provide us some insight. The commentators like to say that Matthew took

available material, like Jesus pronounced these condemnations on the Pharisees and Matthew worked it into a sevenfold pattern of woes.

And he incorporated some material from Luke and he incorporated some other things that he found. And he kind of constructed this to build toward the climax of his gospel. I understand why some would say that, but I would suggest to you that Jesus offered this teaching on many different occasions.

He, he said everything that Matthew says he said on this occasion verbatim. There were other occasions where he also made similar points. Jesus traveled about to towns and villages.

He was on hillsides. He was in the boat at the seaside. He delivered these messages over and over again.

One of the reasons the disciples who would some become writing apostles remembered what he said so well as they heard it more than once they heard it on different occasions in different venues. And the principles were impressed upon their souls by the Holy spirit that Jesus breathed on them. But take a look at this similar passage beginning in verse 37 of Luke 11.

Jesus was speaking and a certain Pharisee asked him to dine with him. So he went in and sat down to eat manifestly a different and earlier occasion. When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that he had not first washed before dinner.

He didn't go through the formal ablutions that Pharisees would be at great pains to demonstrate to their guests. So the Lord said to him, you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness, greed and wickedness. Now this is pretty bold.

If you remember that a Pharisee asked him to dine and you would expect the guests to be tactful, be beholden, getting a nice free meal at a, at a rich guy's house. But the Pharisee looks askance at the Lord Jesus marveling that he did not wash before dinner. And evidently this not only involved washing your hands and having your feet washed.

We know about foot washing from other occasions, but they would take a cloth and wipe the dishes that had been placed on the table because someone else had handled them and who knows where their hands have been. So just to be sure that I am not defiled by touching something that a potentially defiled person has touched. I'm, I'm not taking anything for granted.

I'm going to wipe this dish and it's similar to what you find happening now with hand sanitizer and sprays. And we don't know where you've been or what you've got. And so we're going to sanitize everything, including the very air that we breathe and so on.

And, and in the same way that this excessive obsession with, with physical cleanliness became sort of a, a virtue signal. Some of that is going on today. There is virtue signaling going on about physical cleanliness.

So I only mentioned that not because I'm trying to make a social commentary, but so that you understand the mindset. This is the mindset in the, in the spiritual realm. And well, you know, look at me and how, how careful I am being about ritual defilement.

Jesus didn't do it significantly. So the Lord said to him, you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Now, keep your finger here.

Go back to Matthew 23. Jesus said in verse 25, you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Unrighteousness is in the majority text there, but I like the Nestle Allen UBS, the, the, uh, the better generally earlier and often more trustworthy text is when you see NU Nestle Allen UBS, uh, the majority text, the M text in your notes is, uh, the more expanded and conflated.

There will be readings that have been taken from other gospels and shoehorned in such as the, the woe in verse 14, that's been brought over from Mark. This is an M text, uh, signature thing is if there are two readings will either put them both in or, uh, we'll put in one that makes the text easier. And it's generally, there are exceptions, but generally given a choice, if you're reading along and you say, well, I see a text note in my new King James, I wonder which of these is better.

The new King James as the King James did before it generally relies on the majority text. This is the most number of manuscripts, but the most manuscripts are late and most of them have copied, uh, insertions, marginal notes that have been incorporated additions for clarification. And so generally the majority of texts have got less reliable readings.

So given a choice, if, if we haven't talked about it in class or whatever, and you see one and you're just kind of scratching your head in the new Testament, if, if you've got a note that says NU text, generally, that's the better reading. And it is so here, uh, inside full of extortion and self-indulgence, self-gratification compare that in, uh, extortion. This is what you do to others and self-indulgence.

So the heart inside is others are there to get something from. And in my heart, I am looking to make myself happy. Then you look in Luke full of greed, self-indulgence and greed go hand in hand and wickedness, wickedness and extortion, wickedness and doing things at other people's expense go together.

Foolish ones, verse 40 of Luke 11. Moroi, how many times has Jesus said fools and blind in our context, foolish ones. He's calling the host of the dinner to which he has been invited and has accepted the invitation.

His group, his, his click fools, fools. It's, it's a little stronger. You know, when you say, well, that's just foolish is it's a, it's milder than saying you fools.

Did he, did not he who made the outside make the inside also. And notice how, just as in Matthew, Jesus says, do you not realize that God is present. You've turned this into a godless system and you have forgotten God.

You think about the apostle Paul toward the end of one of his letters, when he says, let your moderation be known unto all. You remember the next line, let your moderation be known unto all. What's the next thing that he says, the Lord is at hand and he's not saying the rapture is close.

Let your moderation, let your balance, let your self-control, your, your suppression of passion. Let your moderation be known to all. Why the Lord is in the house where two or three are gathered in my name.

I am there in the midst. Jesus says, how would you comport yourself? What would your conversation be like? What would your attitude be like if the Lord Jesus were visibly present? Jesus says he's invisibly present. My folks used to have a plaque on the wall when I was a child that said, the Lord is the head of this house, the silent guest at every meal and the listener to every conversation.

I messed that up a little bit. The Lord is the head of this house, the unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation. That's how it went.

One of the first things I learned to read and it's true. And if we would keep that truth in mind, we could avoid this tragic error on the part of the scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites. Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? It is just important.

He doesn't say, don't worry about the outside of the dish or the cup. It should be clean. Just as he said about the tithing, he said, you should have paid attention to the weightier matters of the law and not left off the other.

The outside of the dish is important. Do not let your good be spoken of as evil. Let your light so shine before men that they see your good works.

The outside is important, but transparency, reflecting cleansing in the inner man, a sacrifice that is holy and acceptable to God from a renewed mind and a cleansed heart. That's the only way. God made the outside and the inside.

Um, the presence of God ought to be something of which we are mindful. So verse 41, rather give alms of such things as you have, then indeed all things are clean to you. This is a very interesting statement.

It doesn't say quite what it appears to say. Uh, it does say give alms, but it's not the kind

of alms you might suspect. So in our first session here, as we look at these pairs of woes, the first and second together, the third and fourth together, and now this fifth and sixth together and this zeroing in, moving from the outside to this root of the problem.

So something that God does that we tend not to do. We tend to address effects and symptoms and those things which are outside. Man looks on the outward appearance.

The Lord looks on the heart and it is the heart that needs fixing. And it's not that guy's heart or those people's heart. It is my heart, my heart.

What is my behavior? And once again, if we are not finding genuine occasions to go to God and confess our sins, if we do not at least occasionally recognize the need to go to those around us against whom we have sinned and regarding whom we have failed and say, I'm sorry, we need to go back and read and keep reading this until it penetrates from the outside through that middle layer into the heart. Because we all have this instinct of self-preservation, self-justification. We all have a tendency toward self-indulgence and greed.

We all have a tendency to operate, to act, to think, and to speak at the expense of others. It is our nature. It is such as is common to man.

And it is only the power of God that can free us from slavery to that congenital problem and give us the grace and the love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit to reflect the Lord Jesus in our immediate circle and beyond. Well, we'll pause here and take a break. When we come back, there are some fruitful comparisons to be made between Luke 11 and Matthew 23 that actually help us understand things like the key to the kingdom.

And we'll see that when we come back.