

Matthew 22-02-27b

Well, let's continue our study now in Matthew chapter 23. We are looking at the words of the Lord Jesus to the scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites who build the tombs or monuments to the prophets and adorn them and say, if we had lived in the days of our fathers, verse 30, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. We would not have made those mistakes.

We tend to look at this in its literal form, where you have religious people saying, I'm looking at the forefathers and I recognize their mistake. I would never do that. And it's a it's a looking to the past.

But you have to remember that there were not many competitors for Jewish religious practice in the present day. And so if they want to find someone with which to contrast themselves, they go to the past. In the modern day, we look laterally.

We look in the present and say, I see this group making this mistake. I see that group making that mistake. I would never do that.

And we have a lot more opportunity to distinguish ourselves by saying that was a mistake. And that's not a mistake that I would make or that I do make. Their fertile grounds for this was their ancestry, because to them there was no leadership except that which is in Israel.

So they almost have to, by necessity, look backward. But for our purposes, especially when it comes to trying to not reproduce this error, to look around at others and say, well, they're making a mistake. I would never do that.

What if in some blind area we are, in fact, doing the very same thing? And as I look around in the modern day, I see people that I think are doing that. And it's kind of a catch 22 because we all have to be careful that in the act of observing what we perceive to be error, we're not committing that very error in observing and calling out that error. So what does this really require? I think it takes two things.

First of all, what is the objective of prophetic utterance? What is the objective of delivering the word of God to us? It is change of mind, faith and obedience. If we have any other agenda than living our lives in a way that pleases God, that reflects the example and the glory of Jesus Christ, whatever the cost to my pride or my person, that's job one. That's the first and highest priority is to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind.

That should and must eventuate in love that is sacrificial and beneficial to those in my immediate periphery. Love for my neighbor, love for one another. They didn't have social media and people that you could love at a distance or love from afar in the ancient

world.

This lateral love, this horizontal love was for those with whom you come in contact and it takes different forms. In some cases, it is active benefit. It is putting ourselves out on their behalf, putting a shoulder under their burden.

The parable of the Good Samaritan was specifically delivered by Jesus to illustrate this kind of love. He didn't just start a charity that would help anybody who was found beaten up in the side of the road. He personally encountered this victim of robbery and assault.

He personally tended to his needs. He personally provided for future care and then went his way. But he was in personal contact.

He could make a personal judgment, personally invest. Someone didn't take his money as a tithe or a tax and then set up a source of well-being for those who might be in bad circumstances. It was individual and it was personal and it was in his immediate periphery.

So the idea here, if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. I will declare to you my righteousness by saying I would have never done what they did. In the modern day, we have a phrase for this and it's called virtue signaling.

I would never do that. And they are blind to the fact that they are doing that and are about to do it two days hence. They're about to do it.

And here's the thing, if you would not have shed the blood of the prophets, then that puts you in a camp that approves of the prophets and listens to the prophets. There's really only two kinds of people. There are the prophets who are faithful to God and faithful to his word and there are those who reject the word of God and thereby or concomitantly reject God himself.

And Jesus says in another place, you're either for us or you're against us. There is no gray area. There's no compromise in that regard.

So if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Their fathers heard the prophets and in many cases rejected their message and slew the messenger. The reaction that results in the murder of the prophets is the message.

It is rejecting God by proxy and very actively and aggressively rejecting. Jesus says in verse 31, therefore, you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. And you can circle you are sons in verse 31 and circle our fathers in verse 30 and just draw a line between those two circles.

The days of our fathers, you are their sons. You are the sons of those who murder the prophets. And you know, being a son of a thing is to identify with its essence, to be a son of Belial, to be a son of destruction.

Judas is referred to this way multiple times in the Gospels, the son of perdition. Perdition didn't literally have an offspring, but Judas is the poster boy for perdition. He is so closely associated with utter and complete loss because of betrayal that he is a son of Apollia, a son of destruction.

You are witnesses against yourselves because you say it was the days of our fathers. How can you share the attitude of the fathers in denying the message and yet adorn the graves and build the tombs of those same prophets? Well, it's safe. The bones of the prophet are not going to click back together as in Ezekiel's vision and he's not going to emerge and condemn you.

So you can honor and memorialize. And why would you do this? Are they genuinely appreciative of the prophets? Why would you build tombs and adorn monuments to prophets? It's all for show. I want to exhibit righteousness to others.

And by embracing this cause, which costs me nothing and I don't have any need to repent or to express faith or to be obedient to the words that this prophet spoke, I can simply honor him as a prophet in a superficial and calculating way to virtue signal. Look how righteous I am. I've invested money to build up the tomb of poor Zechariah who got murdered.

The issue is not his murder. The issue is his message, right? This has happened in the modern day. You can have, let's take the Bible church movement, you might want to call it.

We are a Bible church. And if we adopt honoring the scripture as our identity, if we tell others, well, we study book by book and chapter by chapter and verse by verse, and this form, we have a high view of scripture. Let me quote my verse.

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable. And the word of God is alive and powerful. I have got so many Bibles in my house.

You can't count them. I've got notes and notebooks. I have all of the external trappings of honoring the word of God as the Bible, as the scriptures.

I've got multiple translations. I can quote it. I've got verses posted hither and yon.

That's an external affirmation. It is an external honoring of something that is truly legitimate. Are the prophets legitimate carriers of the truth of God? Yes, they are.

Is there anything wrong with honoring the prophets, respecting them, mentioning them

and quoting them with respect? There's nothing intrinsically wrong with that. But if you are busy memorializing their death, in the modern day, we can complain about the death of the influence of scripture in our culture and in our Christianity. People are not taking a high view of scripture.

They're throwing out the Old Testament. They're throwing out parts that they don't like. They're whittling it down worse than Jefferson ever did to just the red ink of Jesus.

And we honor the Bible. We'll say that we love the Bible and we love it as it reveals Jesus. But at the same time, we are killing it by denying its authority and eliminating its pertinence and its applicability to us.

There is this external form that denies the power and the substance and it is hollow. It is an adornment on the outside. There is death on the inside.

Well, we like to think that we are not susceptible to this. We're not guilty of it, but it is useful to check. Am I really allowing the truth of the word of God to penetrate into my soul and change me, cleanse me? If I am not growing and if I am not bearing fruit, what kind of fruit? Is there more love? Is there more joy? Is there more peace? Is there more patience? Is there more endurance, long-suffering, not getting torqued when things don't go the way my infinite wisdom tells me they should have gone? Am I gentle? Can I deliver a soft answer in the face of wrath? Remember the verse, soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.

Just throw, I saw a video, this is the problem with the internet, you see things. Some lady had a jar candle and the whole top of it caught fire. So all of the puddled wax was, it was like a giant flame all in and without thinking she grabbed a cup of water to douse the flames.

Well, this is like putting water on a grease fire and it exploded and they showed these enormous blisters on her hand and her burned face and it caught her shorts on fire and scarred. She's got all kinds of burn scars on her hip from this giant fire that she inflicted on herself and it reminded me of a soft answer turneth away wrath. You've got this flame that is out of hand and they said, well, what you should do is if it's a jar candle, just grab the lid, which ought to be sitting nearby, get an oven mitt if you need to, but grab the lid and just put it on there and starve it of oxygen and it'll go out of its own accord in seconds.

That's the principle of candle snuffers. You don't even have to, you know, people mash the wick down into the wax when they're trying to put out a stick candle. You just put that little hood over it and it uses up the oxygen in that little area and before more oxygen can get in, the flame goes out.

So you just put that little candle snuffer above the flame. You don't even have to touch

the wick and it will die. And so if you do have any of these jar candles and if one of them catches fire, do not throw water on it.

Look at the videos on YouTube of what happens when water gets thrown on a wax fire. It is explosive and a soft answer is like just putting the lid, starve it of oxygen, don't give it anything to feed on and it will go out. But if you respond with grievous words, that just exacerbates the problem.

If we are growing in grace and knowledge of the Savior, if we have genuine penetration of the prophetic Word of God, the power of the Word of God in the hands of the Holy Spirit, our fruit of the Spirit should be evident. It should be growing. When you look at vines and branches in a vineyard, can you see the grapes? In season, these things are heavy with clusters of grapes.

That's the simile that Jesus gives us. In fact, it's a metaphor. He says, I am the vine, you are the branches.

Abide in me and bear much fruit. Quick gut check of whether or not we are abiding in Christ in the true and genuine sense. Where is the fruit? Any branch that does not bear fruit, what does Jesus say? Essentially, woe to you fruitless branch, because my Father will come and prune it.

Chop it off. Paul uses a similar picture in Romans when he says this tree of God's plan and purpose has branches that have been broken out due to faithlessness and the wild olive branches of the Gentiles were grafted in. But he says, don't boast.

Don't talk about, well, I would have never done what those branches did and got themselves snapped out. I'm a faithful branch. Well, you can say you're a faithful branch.

You can signal your virtue. But where's the fruit? And Paul says, beware, because if you exhibit the same faithlessness, you can be snapped out of the tree just as the faithless Jewish branches were. And Jesus puts it even more succinctly in John, I think it's 15.

I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me so that you bear much fruit. Am I abiding? Where's the fruit? Do I find myself able to be more patient, able to be more kind? Do I have more joy that doesn't depend on my circumstances? Anybody can be joyous in happy circumstances.

Any unbeliever can do that. The pastor from long ago used to say anything the unbeliever can do is not the Christian way of life. Some of you will recognize that statement.

If an unbeliever can do it, that's not a part of who we are as believers. We are supernaturally enabled and empowered. So when Jesus says here, he's quoting the Pharisees.

If we had lived, and notice this is a we and not an I, because this is a mutual admiration society. They get together and tell each other this. Well, we're different.

And there's this affirmation that, well, I agree with you and you agree with me, and I'm okay. You're okay. And oh, we certainly would have done that.

Why don't we pool our resources and go hang another adornment on the tomb of the prophets? We would have never done that. But by not, that's wiping the outside of the dish. And inside, they have got this venom and this horrible, bitter opposition to the Lord Jesus, because he is saying something that they can't account for.

How many times have we seen it in the recent context? They answer him not a word. They've had so long to neutralize the prophets, but they can't neutralize Jesus. And therefore, they hate him.

Well, we should not be finding hate, and we should not be finding fear in our hearts. And if we do, that is not the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, not hate.

It is joy, not despair or undue concern. It is peace, not turbulence. If you go through that list of the fruit of the Spirit, just put the opposite.

List them out. You know the verse, verses. List out the individual pieces of the fruit of the Spirit, and then put the opposite right next to it.

And then we can ask ourselves the question, have I got bitterness instead of love? Do I have depression and concern instead of joy? Do I have turbulence and uncertainty and instability instead of peace? Am I impatient instead of patient? Am I quick to get tied in a knot instead of suffering long? Am I harsh instead of gentle? Let me think back over my recent conversations, my recent interactions. Can I absorb a wrong? Can I absorb being ill-treated, somebody who is inconsiderate or thoughtless instead of thoughtful? Have I been inconsiderate and thoughtless instead of thoughtful? Gentleness, goodness. Do I practice looking at whatsoever things are to the extent that things are pure and noble and lovely, of good report? Is that what I think about, or am I constantly obsessing and convoluting in my mind over things that aren't the way I wish they were? Faith.

Am I committing uncertain situations and problems that don't seem to have an immediate solution? Am I trusting God for that? Am I committing myself to the hands of a faithful creator? Do I know whom I have believed, whom I have placed my faith in? Am I convinced, am I persuaded that He's able to keep what I commit to Him against that day? Faith, humility, meekness. This is strength under control. Just because I can do a thing doesn't mean I should.

Just because I can say a thing doesn't mean I should. Just because I know something doesn't mean I should share that something. Meekness is strength or power harnessed under control.

It is the ox who could turn and destroy the plow and the plowman and everything else and go running through a fence, but he patiently pulls that plow down a straight furrow, responding to the guidance of the plowman behind him so that there is beneficial work that is done. Strength under control. Humility.

Just because I can doesn't mean I should. And then temperance, self-control. Anybody can act on impulse.

Anybody can be carried by emotion. Anybody can ride the high waves and sink into the deep troughs. Can I level myself? Can I restrain my hilarity? And can I refuse to yield to depression and discouragement? Self-control.

This is control of the heart. I'm not going to let my mind go down that road. I'm not going to contemplate the wrongness of this or that or the other.

I am in control of my own thoughts, my own decisions, and my own words. There is a time to speak, and there is a time to be quiet. I could use a much stronger phrase there, but just think of the strongest way of saying, be quiet.

There's a time to speak, and there's a time to refrain from speaking. And I would say this is one of our biggest areas of failure, is letting speech come out that shouldn't. Now, a great man of my acquaintance used to caricature this by saying, words, come back.

He's trying to unring the bell. Don't ring that bell. Don't let the words leave in the first place, because saying words come back doesn't retrieve them.

The damage is done. The harm is inflicted. And as it says in James, the man who controlled, you know, the tongue is a fire that's lit by the flames of hell.

And the man who can harness his tongue and control his tongue, he's got his whole body in subjection. Well, these are gut checks. List that fruit of the spirit, look at their opposites, and examine ourselves.

If we are in the faith, if we are abiding in the vine, the fruit will be emergent. It will be visible. That is living in the kingdom.

All of this talk about the kingdom, kingdom people, kingdom this, kingdom that. The kingdom is the vineyard producing heavy clusters of luscious grapes in the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. We are what the millennial kingdom dwellers will look back at for guidance on what their kingdom ought to look like.

And heaven help us if we provide an example of the fathers slaying the prophets. The fathers were not a good example to look back at. And yet the Pharisees act as though they were.

Oh, we love those prophets. Jesus says, these are the prophets' murderers that you're

calling your fathers. And you're saying, oh, we would have never done that.

You're in the act of doing it. And this is famously happening in our present day where political opponents are accusing those on the other side of doing the very things that they are visibly in the act of committing. It's horrendous.

We don't want to partake of that. But now we come to our second imperative. Look at verse 32.

You are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then, and this is an imperative, fill up the measure of your fathers. Guilt isn't there.

Scratch it out. It's the measure of your fathers. You have already measured your fathers and found them short.

We would have never done what they did. But you've also proclaimed that you are their sons and you have inadvertently convicted yourself out of your own mouth. Fill up the measure of your fathers.

And they're going to. They're going to murder the prophet, capital P, who has most effectively communicated and embodied the truth of God. If you've seen me, you have seen the father.

The son reveals the father and they're looking at this revelation and they are making every effort to neutralize him and indeed to kill him. Serpents, brood of vipers. And this is a bracket.

These men were identified as serpents and brood of vipers by Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist. You can also look at John chapter 13, verse 27. Jesus said, the one who I give this morsel after I have dipped it.

He dips the morsel at the last supper, quote unquote, gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. When Judas had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus said to Judas, what you are about to do, do quickly.

Fill up the measure of your fathers, Jesus says in going all the way back to Genesis chapter 15. Remember when God tells Abraham, you will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a ripe old age. This is Genesis 15, 16, in the fourth generation, your descendants will return to you.

They're going to be oppressed by foreigners. Even though you will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a ripe old age, but in the fourth generation, your descendants will return here for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete, is not yet full. The iniquity is not yet full.

And the filling is going to take multiple generations. It's so interesting because this is not single individuals becoming as wicked as they can possibly be. This is a people, a group over time, filling up iniquity.

Jesus is talking to the Pharisees who have been evil for generations. These scribes who have been evil for generations. And he says, fill up, top off the cup that has been filling over time by your predecessors as well as you.

You are the ones who are going to fill it up. When the iniquity of the Amorites is full, that's when God is going to deliver his people out of Egypt and send them into Canaan to judge those Amorites. But it is pictured as something that fills up.

Remember the same idea in Romans chapter two? Turn there. This is where we're going to close for the morning because we are interested primarily, not so much in joining in the condemnation of the Pharisees, but avoiding it ourselves. We saw this when we went through the book of Romans in detail.

Verse two, we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice suppression of the truth, denying God. We know the judgment of God is according to truth against those. Notice it is the judgment of God.

It's not just inevitable consequences of being less than all we can be, which is widespread today. People are saying God is not a judgmental God. He's not a volcano God.

He's not a virgin sacrificing belligerent God. He's all love. And when we participate in sin, he just backs off and lets it have its own consequences.

Sorry, no. Read Romans. The judgment of God is against those who practice such things.

It's God's judgment, not just consequences, not just cause and effect. Do you think this old man, you who judge those practicing such things and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? This is why the Pharisees and scribes, these hypocritical religious leaders, are sons of their fathers, because they refuse to repent. In accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart, Romans 2.5, you are treasuring up for yourself.

You are filling up a cup. Wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. How can you read Romans and not understand that God is not sitting idly by, waiting for built-in consequences of poor decisions and bad behavior, sinfulness and wickedness, to sort of automatically judge someone, penalize someone? You are storing up, treasuring up, filling up a cup for yourself.

Wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. God who will

render to each one according to his deeds, to those who by patient continuance in doing good, seek for glory, honor, and immortality, eternal life. Not just salvation or duration, but quality, identity, proximity to God in the eternal future.

To those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. Upon every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, for there is no partiality with God. God is actively and impartially judging and determining consequences.

You can no more say that God just leaves evil people to the inevitable consequences of their evil in a passive sense, than you can say that good people, their good is going to automatically result in glory, honor, and immortality. That by being nice, you're going to suddenly be resurrected and glorified and live forever and be in the vicinity of God's kingdom capital, have real estate within the new Jerusalem, and bask in the glow of the light which comes from the Lamb. That it will just sort of automatically happen.

Both are actively determined and executed by God. Reward and judgment. We are writing the record as we speak.

Our thoughts, our actions, our priorities, our goals, our values. And the Pharisees fooled themselves. They built ornate tombs to the prophets and said, like little Jack Horner sitting in the corner, sticking in a thumb and pulling out a plum and saying, what a good boy am I? We need to be warned and motivated to examine ourselves.

And if we're not finding that fruit, and by the way, we're always harping on the negative. It is a wonderful encouragement and it contributes greatly to peace. If we examine ourselves and say, you know what? Because of the things that I have learned from the word of God, and because I am prayerful, and I do feel the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit is making a difference in my attitudes.

I don't find myself as discouraged, as depressed, as disheartened. I do find myself with more of an outward view and more of an optimistic expectation that despite circumstances, I have peace. And I am able to concern myself and to invest myself in the lives of others around me and express genuine love.

And when you find that, praise God. Be thankful and bless His name. The Lord is good and His mercy is going to endure to us.

That's the end of Psalm 100, if you recognize it. Make a joyful noise to the Lord. All ye lands, serve the Lord with gladness.

Come before His presence with singing. We know that the Lord is God. He made us.

We didn't make ourselves. And when we have that fruit of the Spirit, this is something

God has been able to produce in us, not something we can generate on our own. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him and bless His name. And we will see because we are diligently subjecting ourselves under the mighty hand of God to the authority of His truth and to the convicting ministry of His Spirit.

And when we do repent and when we do express faith and we are obedient and we do see that fruit, praise God. What else do you want to make you happy than present peace and future happiness that cannot be taken away? Thieves don't break in and steal. Moths and deterioration do not corrupt it.

When God gives, it can never be taken away. And when we see those positive signs that the fruit is in fact growing and being born on our little branches, that's affirmation. We're on the right track.

If it's not there and if we're having trouble locating it, something needs to change because this is our function. This is our purpose. This is our reason for being.

And abiding in Christ and letting the power of God flow through us and outward from us is the fulfillment of the highest and greatest calling to love God and love one another. The Pharisees were at the complete opposite end of that spectrum. And Jesus is effectively calling them out for it.

And this is why the crucifixion is going to take place day after tomorrow from the delivery of these words. Well, much to think about. We'll resume our study here in Matthew 23 next time, but let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the privilege we have of living in this age, being endowed with so much potential by the presence of your spirit, by so great access to the truth of your word, the ability to understand it, know what it really means, and it leaves us with every opportunity to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that that will be the result, and we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.