

Matthew 22-03-06a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the sixth day of March 2022. We continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew, coming to the climactic portion of chapter 23 in preparation for the very notable contents of chapter 24.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll get started. Father, what a privilege it is for us to spend this time together to be encouraged and taught through the ministry of your Holy Spirit. We thank you for the preservation of your word and especially the words of the Lord Jesus that we have before us this morning.

We ask that as we look at them together, we will be enlightened, we will see the pertinence and the application for our own lives in these rebukes, exhortations, and declarations from the Lord Jesus. We pray that as a result we can be good stewards of the light that has been entrusted to us, that our hope will be visible and that we will find those who ask us a reason for it and will be equipped to share with them the good news of your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask it in his name.

Amen. As we come to the concluding section of the woes, even though they are woes, it's been very fascinating to study them and to find that the word of God, which is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction, is so pointedly vivid in this section about false religion, about convincing ourselves that we are followers of God and are living a life of righteousness and faithfulness, when in fact it is the opposite. It's somewhat of a sobering observation that we can be so blind as human beings.

It is rare that someone would wake up in the morning and say, well, I'm a hypocrite. I'm a self-righteous, externally whitewashed, internally dead man bone kind of person. I think I'll go out today and perpetrate some evil and oppress some widows and engage in a bunch of heinously ungodly behavior all in the name of God.

That's the kind of mustache twirling evil that we never suspect ourselves of. And how can we know if we are on the path or not? We have to ask. We have to go to God and ask him to reveal to us our hidden faults.

This is the reason that Psalm 51 is right in the middle of our Bible. If you crack open most standard Bibles, you will find yourself at or very near the middle of the book of Psalms. And in that ending of the first third there, right at Psalm 51, the attitude that King David had, the difference between King David and King Solomon, is to be found in that heart attitude.

As we look at these criticisms, if you will, or charges against the scribes and the Pharisees, it would be useful to turn back and just review. I have alluded to Psalm 51

many times, but I'd like to read it quickly as a reminder of the contrast between the attitude we have here in Psalm 23 and the one that we should have. This is labeled in your New King James, a Psalm or prayer of repentance.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your loving kindness, according to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done this evil in your sight, that you may be found just when you speak and blameless when you judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part you will make me to know wisdom.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones you have broken may rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me by your generous spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners shall be converted to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise. For you do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it. You do not delight in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. These, O God, you will not despise. Do good in your good pleasure to Zion.

Build the walls of Jerusalem. Then you shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering. Then shall they offer bulls on your altar.

A couple of quick notes here. There is an interesting theory about verse 5 when David says, and this is a Psalm of David, when he says, Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. And the idea has been floated that David might not have been the son of the same mother that all of the other brothers, sons of Jesse had, that he was the son of a concubine or some other lady with whom Jesse had a child, and that this was the reason he wasn't presented when Samuel came to visit the sons of Jesse.

I personally don't credit that, but it is an interesting idea, because otherwise you have to,

well I say otherwise, I think it is an attempt to solve the puzzle of why David would say conception and birth have sin attached to them in some way, iniquity and sin, and this is an effort to explain that. They allude to David's ruddy complexion and that maybe his mother was a redhead and such. There is no evidence in the Bible for that beyond this particular verse.

In any case, the Bible is replete with individuals whose father is the issue, and there can be, in Jacob's case, four different mothers of his sons. Abraham had two different mothers, well actually three different mothers for his children, Hagar, Sarah, and remember later on, is it Keturah, that he has 17 sons who become fathers of the Arab nations and so on. But more to our point, as you look in verse 18, do good in your good pleasure to Zion, build the walls of Jerusalem.

We are going to see that because of a lack of this kind of heart, attitude, repentance, seeking for cleansing, forgiveness, and to walk in the paths of righteousness, the opposite is going to be predicted for Jerusalem. And Jesus is going to say in our passage this morning, your house is left to you desolate. And the destruction of Jerusalem is going to be detailed in the next chapter.

But of all of the things that we have observed in the seven woes upon the scribes and Pharisees, calling out their hypocrisy, their false religion, their human standards of righteousness that fall so short, as our memory verse says, 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. I would like to emphasize the remedy.

It is much more important if we observe failure and if we observe those who go astray, even in our own time, in our own generation, you look at social media, you look at what's on the various Christian media outlets, whether they are online or on television or on the radio, in bookstores, it is easy to find things with which we would take issue, things that we would find fault. And the looking over the fence at others is a clue that our perspective needs checking. It is important to discern, it's good to be aware, but we should remember Romans chapter two as it follows the last half of Romans chapter one.

And when we see people suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, and although what may be known of God is manifest and evident, it is being ignored, it is being explained away, it is being twisted, it is being sliced and diced and little bits of it are being selected and others are being omitted. It's easy to unconsciously engage in sort of a self-righteous, I would never do that, which is exactly what Jesus covered when we looked at this last week in those woes where, well, we wouldn't do what our fathers did in slaying the prophets and yet they are busy ornamenting and decorating the tombs of the prophets that their fathers slew. And for some perspective, I just think it's so interesting when the Bible gives us a stereoptican view where we have two accounts that have much the same information in them.

Turn now from Psalm 51 over to Luke chapter 11. We've seen Matthew 23, we've read through it many, many times, but flip over to Luke chapter 11. We looked at this a bit last week, but this is an earlier occasion in Jesus' ministry.

This is a year or two earlier. And what I find of interest here is manifold, not only the content, but the fact that the substance of what Jesus presents in Matthew 23 had been presented on other occasions. And this is one of those other earlier occasions.

This is not the first or the only time that Jesus has made these points. One of the reasons that the disciples can remember what Jesus said is kind of like when you follow someone who gives musical concerts and you hear that concert over and over again. You could imagine the roadies could sing all of the songs of the bands that they set up and tear down for and people who do security for them.

Even if the band has come out with a whole new album and all new songs, by the time you've heard that repetition, without even realizing it, you have internalized and created a memory of that material. And it is the case that the reason we have such harmony in the gospel accounts amongst the witnesses to what Jesus taught is he taught it many, many times. These were not one-offs.

They weren't, well, if you missed it yesterday, you didn't get it. And what we have in the gospels are representative episodes, representative occasions where the words of the Lord Jesus are given. You're very familiar with what's in Matthew 23, but on this earlier occasion, Jesus has been talking to the crowds and in verse 29, the crowds are thickly gathered together.

Jesus said, this is an evil generation. It seeks a sign and no sign will be given to it, except the sign of Jonah. That's Luke 11, 29.

It says Jonah, the prophet, the prophet's not there. It's marked out in my Bible, the sign of Jonah for as Jonah became assigned to the Ninevites. So also the son of man will be to this generation.

We've seen in Matthew, Jesus talk about no sign being given except the sign of Jonah. And then he goes on to say, three days, three nights, the queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And indeed a greater than Solomon is here.

And we saw all of this, what 11 chapters ago in Matthew chapter 12, these earlier occasions where Jesus delivered these words, the men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it for they repented at the preaching of Jonah and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. Then he talks about the light under a basket, the light in the body, the light in the eye. Then as he spoke in verse 37, a

Pharisee asked him to have dinner at his house.

So Jesus went in and sat down to eat. Verse 38, when the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that he had not first washed before dinner. The Lord said to him, now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness.

Foolish ones, did not he who made the outside make the inside also. As we saw last week, Jesus so often includes what the Pharisees have left out of their rationale or their calculation or their oaths, their swearing by the altar or by the sacrifice on the altar, by the temple or by the gold of the temple, by heaven and so on. And what they have excluded, Jesus is careful to include, which is what is it that makes those things meaningful? What gives them value? It is God.

It is the presence of God and talking about the outside of the dish versus the inside of the dish. Jesus says, God made the dish and its contents. Why are you not thinking about God? And I will say, as you observe these winds of theology blowing hither and yon to the extent that you do, you will find, as I have found, that many times in the very act of talking about Christianity or talking about what is needed, what we ought to be doing as Christians, talking about God and what God has said and why we should do these things in the light of our relationship with God does not get near enough attention.

God should be the starting place. God's word should be the starting place for our thinking. And if we start with our gut reaction to a situation, be it international or domestic or personal, if we start with a feeling of what we think ought to happen and then we go to the Bible to try to find justification, it is completely and totally backwards.

We have to be people of God, children of God, who shine as lights and the light flows from God in and through us and outward. We don't look at something in the world and then go try to find a couple of verses to collaborate with or to support a particular policy. And it's very difficult to know that we're doing this if we do not have the Psalm 51 attitude.

It takes humility and it takes asking God to give us discernment, to help us to see our hidden faults, to purge us and to cleanse us. It all begins with the vertical relationship. Everything in the horizontal, like the cross, is supported and defined by that vertical element.

And when that is lacking, you come under this condemnation. But Jesus says, foolish ones, did not he who made the outside make the inside also? He doesn't say, don't you know that it's what you eat from the inside of the dish that might make you sick or any of the other points he could have made. He ties the container and its contents back to God.

Rather give alms of such things as you have, then indeed all things are clean to you. Give alms of such things as you have. Instead of worrying about what is the sanctity of what I am taking in, give alms.

And you think about the situation. Jesus has been invited to a supper for which he did not pay. He is a guest and the Pharisee is in a sense sharing his food with Jesus and probably at least the inner circle of his disciples.

Otherwise, I would wonder how we have the account of this conversation in Jesus' words here. Usually the invitation would be extended. So let's say there's at least Jesus and Peter, James, and John at this dinner and they are being fed at the generosity of this host.

But Jesus says, you're worried about washing when what you ought to be focusing on is providing this meal to us or to any other guests who are there as unto God. Do it as alms. And if you do it as unto the Lord and with a generous spirit and a humble heart, everything is clean.

The ritual purification isn't what God is after. He's looking for an expression of a pure heart, not pure hands. Then indeed all things are clean to you, but woe to you Pharisees.

And you know, this guy, I would love to have the movie version of this, the Blu-ray disc or whatever, where the face of the Pharisee is in close focus when Jesus says, woe to you Pharisees as a guest at his dinner. You tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone.

And the consistency of Jesus' message across these years and these occasions, the essentials are there and the repetition ought to cement it into our hearts and into our minds. Yes, it is good to be obedient, even in the details, but you can't observe the details and miss the greater central issue. He's illustrated it with washing hands instead of making sure your heart is pure.

And he talks about the tithing of these small herbs and missing justice and the love of God. Once again, justice is tied to love of God, not just justice, not just social justice, not just feeling sorry for somebody who's got a rough go. I will give an example of a very common theme that is currently floating around the internet where you see a picture of a gas pump sign that says gas is four dollars and change per gallon.

And right next to that is a picture of a woman holding a child in front of a bombed out building in Ukraine. And the words accompanying these two pictures side by side are to the effect that quit your complaining. You know, you're complaining about high gas prices and here's somebody that's lost their house.

This is an emotional argument that isn't actually rational. It is a fallacious argument. It is

a fallacy to take two unlike and unrelated things.

Obviously, there are people and there have been people for decades who have a rough go, but to silence criticism of government policies that have rapidly ruined our economy, raised our prices, devalued our dollar, created unemployment and created an influx of people that aren't supposed to be here. And to attempt to silence any criticism of the fact that we should not be having to pay these high prices and it has nothing to do with our ability to generate energy in this country. It has everything to do with extremely poor, misguided government policies.

And to say, well, shut up because there's people that have it worse than you. This is a fallacy. I have all the sympathy in the world for people who are under attack, whose way of life is being destroyed, who are refugees.

This is happening. It has been happening for years. In the same way that baby Jessica, when she fell down the well, those of you who are old enough to remember that, there are little children in all kinds of dire straits, but we have this myopic view where one child suddenly becomes the focus of attention and there's press and there's helicopters and there's donations and everybody makes a huge unbalanced focus on one child.

Two blocks away, there could be another child that's living in a crack den or a group of children or a family of children or a whole neighborhood full of children. There are already people doing everything they can to help the baby out of the well. It is interesting.

You hope that it's okay. But to blithely ignore all other children who are in distress or to have an emotional response that is largely generated by the press reflects a lack of objectivity. The Word of God gives us objectivity.

There are always going to be tragedies in the world, but to think clearly and rationally in a postmodern world is just becoming so difficult. It's difficult to find, and I'd say some of the greatest discouragement in the world is not military actions or poor government policies or the rest of it. It is the grotesquely sad inability of people to think, to reason, to determine what is right and what is wrong, what is important and what is not, to have the opinions of celebrities outweigh the opinions of people who are actually knowledgeable and experienced and so on.

We just live in a weird postmodern world where reason isn't valued, facts and experience are not given credit, and the Word of God is supplying this to us. So when Jesus says, Woe to you Pharisees, you have passed by justice and the love of God. The two are tied together.

The love of God defines and creates the content for this justice. It's not just any old justice. It's not emotional justice.

It's not wishful thinking justice. It's not poster child justice. This is justice that is practiced by individuals because of love for God.

If God is not in it, wiping the dish, if you don't remember that God made the dish and its contents, is pointless. Justice without God, and there are many believers today who are calling out for justice, but they're calling out for justice in the same way that any unbeliever can do it. And God is not in it.

There's no connection. There is no explanation of how this connects to godly living, to genuine piety, to a biblical worldview, and that we should do this because God calls us to it, because it is a part of discipleship, because it is a part of following Jesus. That part is left out.

When you disconnect it from love of God through Christ, any unbeliever can do it. And it is not gold, silver, and precious stones, even though it might be the very same attitude, the very same action, the very same thing that is supported. So Jesus makes emphasis here and in Matthew 23 of the importance of God being at the center of our thinking, not these externalities.

Verse 43, Woe to you, Pharisees, you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces, to be acknowledged, doing what you do to be seen by men. And the name for this, as I've mentioned recently, is virtue signaling. I want to be seen.

I'm going to put up a post or something on Facebook that shows that I'm a caring person. I want people to know how much I care. If we really care, we would pay attention to what Jesus said about doing these kinds of things.

When you do your alms, when you do your good deeds, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. That would mean I don't tell everybody on Facebook when I donate to a charity or when I support a cause. I will go out and do something because of my love for God.

If I think that this particular cause is something that God has put in my bursting radius, in my area of influence, if it's something I can do something about because it is nearby and I can make a difference and I can do it as unto the Lord, that's a great thing to do. Nobody can support all charities. Nobody can underwrite all causes.

I know some very wealthy people, several, and they have to be careful as believers and as stewards of what God has given them. They have to pick and choose. They do not write a check for everyone who asks them.

They do not underwrite every worthy cause. It has to be something that God has put in our path and we say prayerfully and having reflected on it and looked at it in the light of the Word of God, why has God put me here? Why has God made me a steward of this

particular set of resources, be they large or small? And am I expressing my love for God by exercising stewardship in this particular direction, with my time, with my resources, with my donation, whatever it may be? If it isn't tied to our love for God, why are we doing it? Any unbeliever can do stuff not out of love for God. Anybody can be swayed by pictures of dogs shivering in the cold or little babies with flies in their eyes and there's wonderful emotional appeals that are made all the time and people respond and give.

Where is God? If God's not in it, whatever is not of faith is sin. And in your effort to be kind and to be caring and to think you are doing a good thing, that's what these people are doing. They think they're doing good things.

They don't wake up in the morning twirling their pharisaical mustaches and deciding what evil they can perpetrate. They believe they're righteous. They've joined the righteous club.

They've made some personal sacrifices and have invested themselves in many ways in this paradigm of righteousness. But somewhere God went missing justice and the love of God. Justice without the love of God is not justice.

It's human intervention often misguided, often with misunderstanding, often deceived. Things are presented in a certain way and then like Paul Harvey used to do, you get the rest of the story and come to find out all was not as it appeared. And people get fleeced.

Causes are not what they seem. Money doesn't go where it's intended. There is a backlash.

You talk to somebody who's actually there and they say, you know, your quote unquote help is making things worse. God will guide us into areas that are truly effective, that truly express justice if we love him and if we are the called according to his purpose. You can't support every good thing in the same way that a Marine rifleman and a squad can't run all up and down the battle line just firing bullets every which way.

There is an assignment. You've got a particular field of fire that is your assignment to cover. If you're an artillery battery, you've got a mission to support one specific infantry unit.

And as tempting as it might be to hear on the radio that there's a target coming and can't we just swing the guns around and attack it? Sorry, no. You've been given your ammunition and your place and your assignment for a reason. That's someone else's area of responsibility.

Let them cover it. Let them handle it. Don't interfere.

Don't expend your ammunition. And now when your time comes, you've got no rounds left. You were misguided in your enthusiasm and you were deceived into thinking that

this was a thing and it's not.

I cannot emphasize enough. God has to be at the center of our thinking, whether it is politics, whether it is international happenings, whether it is causes, whether it is what you see on the internet in various Twitter or Facebook or whatever it might be, YouTube videos. There is a swamp.

There is an ocean, a roiling, broiling collection of everything from pillar to post. We're going to see Jesus talk about from pillar to post here in just a moment. And we have to have discernment and we who have been privileged to study the word of God together and we know what Jesus has taught.

We've been through John. We've been through Mark. We've been through Luke.

We're nearly through Matthew. How is it that we could not know how to do this and how to do it right? We have this counter example of the Pharisees that has been before us for many weeks, never more pertinent than right now. There is so much faulty thinking in the Christian world as we speak.

There are Christians in the media who will tell you that they are, and yet they espouse views where the love of God is not there. And it leaks out. It betrays itself in behavior and in language and in ad hominem attacks on people instead of talking about what is the rightness or wrongness of this position.

And as thinking believers, we can't be deceived. How many times has Jesus said, let no one deceive you. Don't be fooled here.

Foolish ones. You've been fooled. You've been fooled into a system that seems right, but the ends thereof are the ways of death.

So woe to you, verse 44 in Luke 11. And it says, woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites. It's not a big deal, but it's not there.

It just says, woe to you. He said, woe to you Pharisees in verse 43. Here, he just says, woe to you for you are like graves, which are not seen.

And the men who walk over them are not aware. And this is the flip side of the whitewashed tombstones that we saw last time. So then one of the lawyers answered and said, teacher, by saying these things, you reproach us also.

He said, woe to you also lawyers. Guy's probably sorry he spoke up. Wait a minute.

You're painting with a broad brush. And he says, I'll give you a specific woe. You load men with burdens hard to bear.

You yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Again, we saw this in

Matthew 23. Woe to you.

You build the tombs of the prophets and your fathers killed them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers. They killed them.

You build their tombs. You're all about the death of the prophets instead of the message of the prophets. Form without substance.

Empty honor. Does a dead prophet care if you adorn his tomb or decorate his grave? If that prophet could rise and speak like Samuel did to the witch of Endor, what do you think he would say? Did you hear what God's message was that I died to deliver? Do you remember the message or you just remember that I got killed? Which is more important? Killing of a prophet is an emotional issue. The message of the prophet is a spiritual issue.

We are people of the spirit. Walk by means of the spirit. Be filled with the spirit.

You bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers. They killed the tombs and you build their tombs. They killed the prophets and you build their tombs.

Therefore, the wisdom of God also said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of them they will kill and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation. This is a real fascinating claim that is made both here and in Matthew 23 and we're going to take some time to look at it. How can the current generation be called to account for all the blood that has ever been shed going back to Abel? Jesus says all of that blood, guiltiness, is going to come on this generation.

What does he mean? Well, we'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we will attempt to answer that question and see what its meaning is for us. Let's pause here and take our break.