

The Seven Woes

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 January 2021

Preacher: Chad Bennett

[0 : 00] Please open your Bibles to the book of Matthew in the 23rd chapter, and today we'll begin looking at verse 13. Now we had a couple weeks where we weren't in Matthew, so maybe you remember, maybe you don't, but last time we saw that Jesus had rebuked the false religion of the scribes and Pharisees.

And I'll talk a little bit more in a minute about what we saw, but what I'd like to do is we're going to begin the sermon in verse 13, but I want us to at least go back and read verses 1 through 12 so we remember the context.

And I spoke last time that we needed to divide this up. It's a larger passage, but it'd be good for us just to remember by going back through verses 1 through 12.

So let's begin in verse 1 of Matthew chapter 23. Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do.

For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

[1 : 16] They do all their deeds to be seen by others, for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. And they love the place of honor at feasts, and the best seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the marketplaces, and being called rabbi by others.

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one father who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.

The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Now moving into what we're looking at today, the seven woes.

Jesus says, But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces, for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

[2 : 30] Woe to you, blind guides, who say, If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing. But if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath. You blind fools, for which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?

And you say, If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing. But if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath. You blind men, for which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

So whoever swears by the altar, swears by it, and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple, swears by it, and by him who dwells in it.

And whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by him who sits upon it. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law.

Justice and mercy and faithfulness, these you ought to have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel.

[3 : 41] Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones, and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you build the tombs of the prophets, and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets. Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murder the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

[5 : 12] Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. Let's pray together. Dear Heavenly Father, again we ask for your help in the preaching of the word that you would be with us now to make clear the meaning of your word, that you would apply it to our hearts.

Lord, help us not to fall into the error of these men. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. So last time when we were in Matthew 23, we looked at verses 1 through 12.

I said we looked at Jesus' rebuking of the scribes and Pharisees already, but in particular we looked at the inconsistency of their lives, what we could call hypocrisy, what Jesus does call hypocrisy as he moves on.

So we looked at inconsistencies or hypocrisy and pride, and we saw those being displayed in the things that were laid out for us there in verses 1 through 12. And so I think what we see in this part that we're looking at today is really some examples of this.

How is it that they were hypocritical and proud? And Jesus lays out seven woes in this passage, pointing to the specific ways in which they have shown their hypocrisy and their arrogance.

[6 : 22] But more than that, we have to see these as declarations, not just a list of things that they've done, but declarations of actual judgment upon the things that they have done.

So the language may be lost in us. We get the sense that woe is not good, right? Woe is bad. But there's actual spiritual meaning to what's being proclaimed in this.

So in the Old Testament, you would have a prophet, and he would come and he'd give a word from God. And you guys can kind of experience this as well. You've seen letters that you've got in the mail, and you know, just reading the introduction of the letter, what it's going to be about, right?

You open a letter up and it says, we regret to inform you. And you go, oh. Maybe you submitted something for publication. We regret to inform you that your submission has been rejected. All you have to see is, we regret to inform you, right?

Or, I don't know what the positive would be. I always get the regret one. So we're pleased to let you know, or we're pleased to inform you. And for us, maybe the pleased and regret might be the equivalent.

[7 : 26] But in the Old Testament, a prophet would come and he would say, one of two things would begin his message. Blessed or woe. And so you can imagine the people, they're sitting around, they're kind of listening.

Here comes a prophet. What's he going to say? Blessed, woo, yes. Or woe, and you're like, oh no. But you get a sense of the message from the very beginning. And so a prophetic declaration of blessing would begin with something like blessed.

But a declaration of judgment begins with woe. So when you hear, woe are you, you understand that this is not just Jesus saying, oh, I'm sorry that you're this way. Or, you know, you guys aren't doing real well.

He is proclaiming from God the Father as a prophet, speaking God's word, the word of God itself, to them and saying, you're judged by God. And so this is powerful.

It's not just example. This is actually a declaration of curse upon them. And declaring seven woes, that actually follows an Old Testament pattern. So for example, in Isaiah chapter five, we have six woes that are given.

[8 : 30] And in Habakkuk chapter two, we have five woes that are given. So a sequence of woes was a common pattern for prophets in the Old Testament. And Jesus is following that pattern in the proclamation of woes against the scribes and the Pharisees.

I think there's also a way we could look at this and say it corresponds to what Jesus did in Matthew five with the Beatitudes. Remember there, there was a sequence. There was a list. Blessed are you. And he'd go through what brings blessing to us.

And we talked about back then, it's not the action itself, but it's the people who are blessed are those who know Christ. And those works flow out of that blessing, that relationship. And so we're blessed through our relationship with Christ.

So too, I'm going to argue today that what we see is they're cursed because of another relationship that they have. And we see that really at the end of the passage. But we talked about before, there was a recurring theme in what we saw before in verses one through 12.

So also here, and you may have caught it even as I read through there, certain things were being repeated, weren't they? Hypocrites and blind guides seem to be the recurring theme about them. They're hypocrites.

[9 : 38] And we think back to the pride, they think highly of themselves, but in truth, they're misleading God's people. They're blind guides. And so those are the recurring themes of judgment that are being presented. They themselves were misled, and they were misleading others.

They were not getting into the kingdom, and they were keeping others from getting into the kingdom. This is kind of a description of what all was going on. So I want to take some time to look at each of these woes, and then at the end to draw some application.

But even as I do so, the tendency, and you may have heard even how I prayed, the tendency, the temptation for us as Christians is to think or to act or to be like the Pharisees and scribes in this instance.

So this is a great opportunity for you to be a hypocrite because as we read through this list, the tendency is going to be to be, that's what the scribes and Pharisees were like. Boy, I'm glad I'm not like that.

And you realize, even if we step back for a second and think about that, that we're doing the very same thing the scribes and Pharisees did, right? Remember the Pharisee praying in the temple?

[10 : 42] Lord, thank you that I'm not like that guy. The tax collector. But the tax collector is over there beating his breast. Lord, have mercy on me. So my challenge to you as we begin looking at these is not to say, boy, I'm glad I'm not like the scribes and Pharisees.

Right? That'd be easy to do. I want to challenge you to do something far harder. To say, how am I? Like the scribes and Pharisees. And then I hope you'll leave here beating your breast.

Lord, have mercy on me. Of course, I want to assure you that there's mercy in Christ as well. But as we look at this, don't say, I'm glad I'm not like that. That would be to commit the very same thing and you'd be proving that you are like them.

You see? Instead, let's consider how are we like them and how can the Lord help us in this? So, as we look at this, I tried to group these that may or may not be helpful, but in really looking at the first couple, they prevented others from being saved.

So, we see in the first one, they shut the kingdom of God to others. We see in verse 13, the second part of verse 13, that they themselves did not enter the kingdom of God.

[11 : 58] In John 7, 45-48, we read this instance. It says, The officers then came to the chief priests and scribes who said to them, Why did you not bring him?

Why did you not bring Jesus? They were sent to arrest Jesus. And the officers answered, No one ever spoke like this man. And the Pharisees answered them, Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? I think there's a conviction and a condemnation upon themselves. They're not entering the kingdom of God.

In fact, they're talking to others and saying, People who are being convinced of this, Are you deceived? Have you seen any of us go that way? None of the, here referred to as the authorities of Pharisees, and I think we could say the scribes and Pharisees, none of us have believed, have we? And I think there's a self-indictment. It's the very thing Jesus is saying. They're not entering the kingdom themselves. They're not believing in the message of the Christ. And in so doing, I would argue, they haven't really understood the message of the Old Testament at all.

[13 : 01] They haven't seen the truth of the gospel as it's been presented. The gospel itself was contrary to everything that they valued. Think about what the gospel calls us to.

It calls us to repentance for sin. But the Pharisees believe and are arguing that they're without sin. They obey the law. We're the ones who keep the law.

So, to accept the gospel is to acknowledge I've broken God's law and I need to repent. But the gospel is not very effective for those who don't see their need for repentance. It calls them to humility and self-denial. But they were proud and they liked being praised by men and thought of as the teachers of the law and being called father and having the seats of honor and being known in the marketplace.

But the gospel calls for humility and self-denial. They were too busy justifying themselves to seek justification from God. And then we see also that they kept others out of the kingdom.

[14:05] Now, I know that there are ways that this can accidentally happen. And I think here's something for us to examine. Are there ways in which we live hypocritically and maybe we're blind to it ourselves that our hypocritical living is leading others or keeping others from the kingdom?

So, for example, people know you're a Christian, maybe at work, and yet the way you live at work does nothing to commend Christ to them. It may be keeping people out of the kingdom.

It may be preventing that. Maybe even there's fear of wearing a GFC t-shirt or having a sticker in your car because if people see how I drive or how I act and they know I'm with that church, ugh. But there's a problem with that kind of mentality, right? That we know that there's hypocrisy in our life, but instead of dealing with it, we'd rather hide the fact that we're Christians. And I think we have to be careful of this kind of thing.

But what I want to argue as well is that Jesus is accusing them, he's declaring judgment upon them, not because they've accidentally kept some people from the kingdom, but I think because they're intentionally preventing people from entering the kingdom.

[15:12] They're purposefully keeping people from Christ. They were leading people away from Christ. I read an example of that already, but we know that as people go to Christ, they persecuted those who went to Christ.

They would kick them out of the temple and ban them from coming to the temple or participating in the sacrifices if they in some way followed Christ. The very belief that they had was focused upon the ceremonial law, which is the shadow, but they denied the reality itself, which is Christ.

And so they focus upon, we're going to do the right tithes and we're going to do the right offerings. But when the true offering, the true Lamb of God comes, they have no interest in Him, which again reveals their own heart that they, themselves, their hearts had not been changed as we're going to see later.

So I've said already they threatened people and removed them from the temple. They opposed Jesus publicly at every chance they got. Jesus would be teaching. They'd go, they'd challenge Him, they'd ask questions as we've seen already. And so I think we can conclude already making some application that we have a responsibility not only to ourselves to believe the gospel but to others in leading them to Christ and at the very least not being a hindrance to them in coming to Christ.

And we ought to examine what are ways that we're not doing a good job at this. It may be that we have in fear not shared the gospel with people that we should be sharing the gospel with. It may be ways in which they know we're Christians and we're living inconsistently in our lives.

[16:44] And look, I realize none of us are going to live perfectly. I remember to me a very humbling lesson that I had one time with a pastor that was doing some training of me.

And myself and another pastor had gone and this older man had been a pastor for decades and was training us and I don't even remember the situation now. I don't know that it even matters but as we were leaving there was some discussion between him and his wife and that wasn't very positive in the discussion, the nature of the discussion.

I don't know if you'd call it an argument or what it was exactly. I don't even remember the details but what I remember is on the way home he called and apologized to us and confessed that he'd sinned against his wife in front of us and that it wasn't enough to tell his wife he was sorry but to tell us that he was sorry as well as to God and I think boy in the ways that we fail are we confessing our sin to our families even in appropriate ways to our children to our co-workers to me I think that's an example of how we live consistent lives even though we're we're sinners we're failures but that says the gospel's changed me just one example but are there ways that we're hindering people from entering the kingdom either by neglect or by hypocrisy in our own lives the second woe is that they make proselytes which proselytes is just a word for religious convert they're converting someone to their religion which would have been Judaism so let's just start with this sounds pretty positive in most of the

Old Testament the Judaism wasn't a very evangelistic religion in terms of taking the gospel to other people they were pretty content to keep it in Israel we read earlier from Jonah Jonah is probably a really classic example of this he used to go and preach the gospel to Nineveh and you may remember when I preached through Jonah my impression of Jonah was he didn't really want them to repent he doesn't like the Ninevites they're foreigners he doesn't really want to see them turn and they turn in really dramatic ways the whole city repents but by the time Jesus is coming Judaism has become has begun to bring people into the religion and so we have an example here of the scribes and Pharisees who are actually going out of their way to bring people into Judaism and so they want people to convert to Judaism and so they brought others but they didn't bring them to Christ did they they brought them to another vain religion a vain religious practice and we don't know what their motivation was but perhaps they even liked the honor of it the idea of having more followers to them as teachers we've already seen that Jesus has condemned them for being called father and teacher and so there may be ways in which they're making converts simply to receive praise of men and then Jesus goes on to say he says and then you make them twice as much a child of hell as yourselves we're going to see multiple examples of this but let's just first say Jesus didn't sin he's not name calling there are definitely ways in which you could go to someone and call them a child of hell and it would be name calling it would be sinful

Jesus isn't doing that he's actually speaking something that's factual so let's just think about this for a second what does it mean to be a child of hell I mean we may use that as a derogatory term but if we think literally of hell and I would take it even further I think we're going to see this later on but and we think of Satan even associated with hell you're a follower of Satan you're a child of Satan you're headed for hell and so they're twice as much headed for hell as they were before they started and you consider that many of the nations around them would have held to all kind of polytheistic religions or even been in some ways not believing in a god of some sort and they bring them into Judaism and they make them worse off than they were before that is crazy almost that you could take someone from a polytheistic foreign religion into Judaism that seems so close to what we believe and in the process you're they're twice as condemned as they were before so why is that well I think the reality is that they've given them assurance that they're close to god they put them in a place of believe safety when there is no safety and it really is one of the most dangerous places you can be in to put it maybe even in terms of how we could do this in

[21 : 31] Christianity when we give people a false hope of the gospel when we make them believe they're saved when there's no true evidence of salvation so on the front end this could be that we receive people into the church who really have no credible confession or profession of faith there's no fruit in their life but maybe they pray the prayer and we receive them into the church we're baptizing them on the spot without even considering where they are spiritually and so they believe that they're a Christian and look both my wife and I we've seen this many times from where we grew up so common area someone walks out they pray the prayer they get baptized that day they go to church for two more Sundays and then for decades they're never in church again and we've had experiences where we've gone to people in our family and friends and we've said to them you know we want you to believe in Christ well I handled that years ago I walked out I prayed the prayer like you haven't been in church in 40 years you don't pray you don't read your Bible there's no fruit in your life that you love the Lord but I prayed the prayer and so there's a way that on the front end we can give people a false perception of safety and I think this is what

Jesus is condemning them hey that you brought them into Judaism but you made them hypocrites like you and they're worse off than they were before because they don't think they need the gospel they think they're secure now but they're not and that's a dangerous place to be in on the other side of that it points to the importance of church discipline that at times when we see inconsistencies in people's life when we see someone's not walking with the Lord that we actually go to them and we say to them look I'm concerned for your salvation and when there's not repentance we actually remove them from the membership of the church and say from what we're seeing in your life you don't seem to be saved do you see that's actually gracious because we're not letting them continue to be deceived and making them twice a child of hell I think that's what it's getting at I think we see as well that hypocrisy has its source in hell children of hell and such people as the scribes and pharisees lead others further astray than themselves and they make them twice as bad and so we could say false religion is often worse than no religion because of that false security you've heard me say before I had a pastor friend who said sometimes you have to get people lost before you can

get them saved you need to see your need for the gospel but Judaism and even Christianity outwardly participating in Christianity but not really being a Christian is a very dangerous position because it makes people think they're okay when they're not Jesus really dealt with something similar back in verse 4 it says they tied up heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on people's shoulders but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger so there's ways in which that they were making things harder they expected not only perfect obedience to the law which was impossible but they added to the law making it even harder for people to try to obey and so they brought them not just to Judaism which wouldn't have been bad in itself but what they brought them to was really legalism you've got to obey the law perfectly like we do and in fact here's some extra laws congratulations here's a few more for you to try to keep and so it left them in a position where they're trying to justify themselves instead of looking to Christ thirdly we see that or let me say second my second broad category is to say that they're blind guides one of the things we mentioned earlier on and so the third the third woe there is that these oaths that speaks of in verses 16 to 22 I won't go back and read all of that but you see the kind of promises that were being made oaths or vows that were made to God and how they were treating them so oaths to God in general were thought binding and in the Old Testament there's really a positive encouragement toward making vows before the Lord making an oath to God but you understand that in Judaism God's name was not spoken most of the time in an effort to try and really even this is a form of legalism as well but God's command is don't take the Lord's name in vain and there are obvious ways we can take the Lord's name in vain I think I'll just use the initials but OMG today to say the word or whatever is a way that we just vainly throw God's name out without giving thought to it so there's ways we could do that but in an attempt to avoid vainly using God's name they wouldn't even speak God's name so first understand God's name isn't spoken very much so how do you make a vow to God well to make a vow to God you didn't want to say God's name because you'd be taking the Lord's name in vain not really but in the added way that the law had been interpreted by the Pharisees and scribes and so instead of saying God's name you would make a vow by something related to God so you say I promise by heaven that I will do this but what makes a vow to heaven binding is it's where God is or you say I vow about a temple or by the altar and your purpose at least initially was to say I'm making a vow before God but I don't want to say God's name and so along the way the scribes and Pharisees taught that such a vow was not binding because you didn't really make it to God you only made it to heaven or you only made it to the temple or you only made it to the altar but then later on they would say but the gold of the altar or the sacrifice of the altar we can talk more about that but the point of that is to say anytime you swear an oath or a vow you're making it to God no matter what you make it on right your promises before the Lord you're to be a person who speaks the truth in what you say and so God's going to hold you accountable to whatever degree you make it legit or not it doesn't really matter God in his omniscience and his justice is always aware of those things going on look at verses 20 through 22 so whoever swears by the altar swears by it and everything on it and whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who sits in it or dwells in it and whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it so there's no getting around it right it's all an oath to God

[27 : 52] Deuteronomy 6 13 it is the Lord your God you shall fear him shall you serve and by his name you shall swear so that here's a positive command that you're to swear by his name but in the process what the Pharisees and scribes were doing by saying that the sacrifice was binding or the gold in the temple was binding but not the altar itself or the temple itself is that they were placing something else higher than God while minimizing the oath by swearing on something that was less than God so they're encouraging people don't swear by God swear by something less than God but then they're raising the thing up to being more than God so there's a way in which there's making other gods and sorts they're in it really they're taking the Lord's name in vain by not giving the Lord's name the honor it deserves and placing other things is more honoring than his name but at the same time they're also giving people a way out so for example you make a vow to the altar okay we understand by what based on what I just said that that vows to God right and God knows you're not going to hide it he's all-knowing and God's going to judge you if you keep it but the scribes and Pharisees were saying well that was just to the altar you don't have to keep that so that really made room for people to lie and think about it in a day and age where there probably was much less that was written in terms of legal binding you know now you can't sign up for a website without having to have the thing you scroll through I know you all read it diligently and then you have to click on the

end that you've agreed to the terms right what we just imagine let me put it this way here's a great example in our day you make an agreement with someone and let's make it really big you're gonna buy the house from them and you're gonna pay this amount of money well we know today if you sit at the table I know some of you have recently you go sit at that table there's 45 pages you're flipping through having to sign I mean 30 times or something but what if you just say we're gonna shake on it and you go you shake on it you're gonna buy the house and then later you say well I'm not gonna buy the house no no no we have a legally binding agreement you go aha but my fingers were crossed right we all know the finger cross trick right this is the religious equivalent of the finger cross trick right well I didn't really vow it to God

I was just the altar and so they're allowing people to lie by making condition for it and we understand we know that that crossing your fingers is really just lying there's not really some kind of legal out by that you know oh oh I'm sorry I didn't realize your fingers were crossed of course you don't have to buy the house right how foolish of me to push for that when your fingers were crossed the whole time we know that's really just a form of deceit and lying and so too they're doing the same thing here they allow for lying by making these oaths non-binding so taking a vow or oath before God was customary in the Old Testament but later Christ teaches us that the act teaches against the act because of such abuse and I think there are ways in which we can still make vows to God but we're not to use God's name as a way of verifying that we're telling the truth so we read for example Matthew 5 34 through 37 I say to you do not take an oath at all either by heaven for it is the throne of God or by the earth for it is a footstool or by Jerusalem for it is the city of the great king and do not take an oath by your head for you cannot make one hair white or black let what you say be simply yes or no anything more than this comes from evil and we know in the epistles that this is repeated as well let your yes be yes and your no be no so there's a call for truthfulness I think Jesus is directly responding to the scribes and Pharisees and the way they're using this for lies and then the next one deals with tithing in verses 23 through 24 we see an example of their strict adherence to the law they're making sure that they tithe even their herbs right you imagine your seasoning rack at home you know you could imagine I'm coming to church I'm gonna make sure look I'm even giving my deal away I don't let anything slip by you can also understand how that's in many ways a much cheaper sacrifice than what God was calling for but they are willing to give away even things that maybe are not so costly but are small such as dill and cumin and other such herbs and Jesus says to string out a gnat and swallowing a camel here's a great visual image for you I don't have to spend a lot of time on this but you can imagine you you have water and you guys have ever had like a soft drink or or maybe a glass of water but you get a bug in it you know you get that gnat in it and you stick your finger it keeps going and you got to pull it out before you drink it maybe some of you just dump it out all together that are more hygiene than me but you got to get it out right and so here's this example of that little gnat gets in your water you got to strain it out but they swallow a camel I mean that's just ridiculous right you can imagine how crazy but you're missing the big thing and you're so worried about this small thing like it's going to contaminate you but you miss what's really important Jesus says you shouldn't have neglected the gnat don't get me wrong but you should have been more concerned with these weightier things and he specifically mentions that they've neglected justice and mercy and faithfulness so they're concerned with cumin and dill but not with justice faithfulness and mercy and I think we're getting again to the heart of what we've seen already with Jesus judgment of the Pharisees and it's this there's a heart issue versus an external issue internal versus external justice mercy and faithfulness are things that flow out of what's going on inside our hearts they've neglected those because nothing's going on in there as we'll see later but they keep the outside things that people see and are aware of Micah 6 8 says he has told you a man what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God this is what they've neglected while trying to keep the specifics of the ceremonial law and then the idea of hypocrites the the third big category and I think I'm somewhere around woe 5 but they have externally clean cups and plates and whitewashed tombs so I combine those two because I think he's it's really the same judgment and this is exactly what I was just getting at they're only concerned with the outside and not with the inside so we saw this already verse 5 they do all their deeds to be seen by others and then also in verse 12 whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted and so they're exalting themselves they're doing everything they can to be seen and they Jesus gives an example obviously plates are a little bit harder for us to picture but you picture the cup excuse

me yeah picture a cup washing the outside maybe you're doing the dishes and the person before you they drink some really thick coffee and left it in there and that dries on the bottom of the cup and all you want is a drink of water so you wash just the outside of the cup and then you're gonna drink water out of that yeah what's that gonna taste like maybe we could say milk because nothing grosses me out more than milk that's been sitting out right so you have that milk that someone didn't quite finish at the bottom of the cup and you're gonna drink after them and you only wash the outside was the cup clean no not even close and so likewise Jesus compares them like that all you focus on is what people see and you've done nothing to address the inside they're concerned with looking good on the outside inside they're dead and defiled like bones and all kinds of uncleanness Jesus says and this really is probably you've heard me reference it several times in our series of Matthew this is one of my favorites because I think it so well identifies what's going on with the scribes and Pharisees whitewashed tombs while Jesus is speaking this this is a time leading up to the Passover feast is a time in which they would do that kind of thing they would go to we would think of cemeteries and they'd go and they'd actually paint the tombs of those maybe relatives or those who were very religious and they'd honor them including the prophets which are spoken of later and so you'd beautify these tombs but the reality is we all know what's inside of them right like you can go even a relative you can clean up the headstone you can put flowers there but it doesn't change the nature of what's inside does it and this is the very thing that they're doing spiritually in fact they actually did make regulations about cleaning the cup and plates that Jesus doesn't command and he addresses in March 7 but we really don't have time to look at that so he may be addressing specific practices but you understand as well that he's saying that there's still inside that there's an internal problem so we see that as he talks about that inside it's filled with all kinds of dead men's bones and uncleanness they outwardly appear beautiful this is verse 27 but within are full of dead people's bones and all kinds of uncleanness so you also outwardly appear righteous to others but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness so we know he's not just speaking of cups and plates is he he's saying this is your nature you're filled with all these things hypocrisy and lawlessness and it's interesting lawlessness because lawlessness means they're not keeping the law which is the very thing the

[37 : 27] Pharisees and scribes prided themselves in and he's calling them lawless and then finally and most agree this is probably the greatest condemnation upon them that they venerate the prophets whom they themselves have killed so there's this honor given to prophets when they kill Matthew Henry says they pretended a deal of kindness for the memory of the prophets that were dead and gone while they hated and persecuted those that were present with them this is put last because it was a blackest part of their character God is jealous for his honor in his laws and ordinances and resents it if they be profaned and abused but he has often expressed an equal jealousy for his honor in his prophets and ministers and resents it worse if they be wronged and persecuted so they outwardly today are venerating these guys and they're saying if we would have been alive back then we wouldn't have done that to them but Jesus is saying it's not true I think even as we consider application for ourself are there ways we outwardly pretend to love the things of God and maybe even the people of God but in truth our hearts aren't really in it the ways we do this ways we pretend to love the things of God and the people of God do we maybe pretend to love reading the Bible or praying or maybe even coming to worship when our hearts aren't really in it or the people of God maybe this is even harder so prophets are just some

Christians right do we pretend sometimes to love other Christians when our heart really isn't in it do we say we love church but we neglect corporate worship or don't like being around Christian brothers and sisters so I think again we want to keep thinking of this is apply to us and how does it apply to us they proclaim their innocence yet these are the same ones who are going to kill Christ so let that sink in for a second think back to Jesus's parable the tenants of the vineyard remember the owner of the vineyard sent people his servants to go and tell them to collect his fruit and they killed him didn't they and then finally he sends his own son and they go now we'll get the the vineyard for ourselves and they kill the son as well and so Jesus is saying that this is what you've done you killed the prophets now we're gonna talk about this in a second but just for a moment did they kill any prophets the people who Jesus is speaking to no they haven't yet far as we know they haven't killed an actual prophet but Jesus saying they're guilty of killing the prophets and we're gonna see that's carried out even more as they end up being the ones who kill the

Christ and he says they witness against himself with the words so again we've got to be careful what we say because they're saying if we would have been alive back then we wouldn't have done that I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say this with Adam and Eve right it's not fair that I'm being judged for their sin if I would have been in the garden you would have done the same thing and now we see the same tendency in these scribes and Pharisees saying well we wouldn't have killed the prophets and Jesus saying yes you would have you're guilty the very same thing and so they even speak condemnation upon themselves by witnessing against themselves they're claiming to be those who wouldn't do it when in fact they would and so they proclaim judgment in other words they know it was wrong to kill them and yet they're participating in it themselves Matthew 12 36 and 37 I tell you on that on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned and so I think we have a warning for us that we need to be careful that we don't witness against ourselves maybe imagine we are more righteous than we are and so Jesus goes on he calls them a brood of vipers and we've seen already that he said that they're made children children of hell even more so than themselves verse 33 as well not just brood of vipers but you serpents you brood of vipers so again is Jesus just mad and calling names right when you call somebody a snake you know is it sin on your part probably what I want to argue is that what Jesus is doing is proclaiming a religious judgment upon them so think for a second serpents and vipers draw our mind back to the garden and there was one serpent in the garden who deceived men and brought them into the fall and then after that and I'm gonna get really deep in my times short they're already making the mic fuzzy to get me no that's not why what I want to present to you is really what's called seed theology I don't have time to get into great detail of this but

I would argue that we see from the very beginning when Adam and Eve fall we see the first giving of the gospel in Genesis 3 15 17 15 in Jesus 3 15 with a proto evangelum that from the seed of the woman would come one who would crush the head of the seed of the serpent and I would argue throughout human history what we see is only two groups of people from there on out you have the seed of the woman or really the seed of God and you have the seed of the serpent and so what I see Jesus doing right here is saying you're guilty of these murders because you're a part of that seed your fathers too were seeds of the serpent your seeds of the serpent don't expect that you're gonna do anything different than what the seed of the serpent does they always persecute the prophets they put to death the prophets and so don't be surprised when you kill me as well it's exactly what we should expect from the seed of the serpent and so Jesus isn't just saying all you snakes you brood of like he's saying a brood of vipers are children of the viper children of the serpent he's saying you're children of your father the devil which he says elsewhere in Matthew we've already seen he says you're children your father don't imagine that you're children of Abraham if you're children of Abraham you do the works of Abraham why because Abraham is the seed of the woman or of God you see that so don't call yourself children of Abraham you have the devil as your father and so Jesus isn't just calling names he's actually proclaiming a judgment upon them and saying you're headed for hell you're unregenerate however you want to say that today you're not saved you're not in the kingdom you're a part of Satan's dominion his authority his rule and then he says he talks about the prophets that killed he mentions Abel which was the first murder recorded in all of God's word and again I'd say this points to the seed theology in the idea that Cain who obviously ends up going the wrong direction and his offspring after him fall in that direction is a part of the seed of the serpent who then attempts to kill the seed does kill at least one of the seeds of the woman now consider consider that the promise is given that your child will crush the head of the serpent so what would Satan want more than anything or what would Adam and [44 : 52] Eve expect who are they expecting the Messiah is going to be I would argue they expect it to be Abel at least at first and so Cain kills Abel not just in jealousy but this strife between the two seeds beginning even there and it started there and he says all the way to Zechariah Zechariah was the last murder of a prophet recorded in the Hebrew stretching of the Old Testament so from the first murder to the last every murder of every prophet from all of those you're guilty of those because you're a part of that seed I hope that's beneficial I know that was that was a little weighty there for a minute but I hope that's beneficial to understand what Jesus is doing here so God will judge those who oppose his people I see this as encouragement for us it's both a warning that we need to be careful on who we oppose but also for those of us as Christians when we face opposition by the world and it may be coming and I want to say it's okay if it does in this world you have trouble take heart I've overcome the world our expectation ought to be we're going to have

trouble in this world why because this world is opposed to the children of God that's not surprising to us it shouldn't be look I feel like in

America God has blessed us generously for centuries now but it is abnormal and contrary to what our expectation ought to be as we read the New Testament our expectation ought to be persecution and trouble and it may be coming but guess what it's okay because what we see here is that God's judgment falls upon those who would oppose his people that's encouraging for us but it's also a warning for any of you in this room who have not put your trust and hope in Jesus Christ these woes are proclaimed upon all those who are part of that seed who are opposed to God so just an application obviously there's that there's the gospel that we need to be we need to know who we belong to there's no middle ground either we're followers of Satan or followers of God have we put our trust and hope in Jesus Christ or not so I think that's first and foremost what we have to understand secondly we need to be on guard against hypocrisy in our own hearts so I said how do we relate to this there's not one of us in this room who doesn't struggle with hypocrisy there's ways in which we present ourselves to the church and to our family different than what's really going on in our hearts so we need to be on guard against hypocrisy in our hearts and the judgment that can come from it we need to be on guard against being blind guides we need to be careful not to mislead people or point people in ways that are against God and against his kingdom we also need to be on guard against following blind guides we need to be bereaved that are testing everything your pastor says against the word of God and discarding anything that contradicts it or anybody who stands in this pulpit or anywhere else let me just briefly say when you flip the television on there are plenty of preachers out there you got to be on guard against blind guides because there's plenty of those out there as well don't just assume I'll hear someone preaching and they actually read the word of God they must be okay test them by the word of God and then thirdly I'd encourage us have we focused on minor issues while neglecting to obey God in more important issues have we majored on the minor and minded on the major like the

Pharisees are we often concerned with merely keeping up appearances when our hearts are far from the Lord we need to be foremost concerned with our hearts and the bigger issues and from those things and from our union with Christ all the blessings will flow we'll address the minor issues those will come but we need first to deal with the major issues of our heart fourthly the scribes and Pharisees were only concerned with washing outside but we know from God's word that man looks at the outward appearance but God judges the heart so we need to seek internal washing we need a cleansing of our heart from evil now that's not something we can do right we don't do open heart surgery and scrub that thing out that doesn't work and that could cause infection don't try it please what do we do well what we need is application of the death of Christ to our hearts by spirit first and foremost that salvation we need to trust in Jesus Christ by doing so we have a heart transformation the heart of stones replaced with the heart of flesh and no longer are we dead inside the Pharisees were dead inside because our heart was dead we need spiritual life in our heart but we also need the ongoing work of sanctification we need to be putting to death those things in us from our flesh we also reminded not to trust in our own righteousness but in

Christ's righteousness I hope if anything if you really took this to heart and you saw ways you related to this one major problem with the Pharisees why they're hypocrites is because they trusted in their own righteousness we have to realize there's not one of us who are righteous no not one none of us are good enough so my hope is that this points us to the gospel this helps us see we need Christ because I don't measure up if you're honest you know there are ways in which my heart is still defiled there are ways in which I'm a hypocrite the problem is they rejected that prophet and put him to death we have to receive Christ and put our faith and trust in him and so I said the beginning I'll repeat again we I think apply this passage by seeing the ways that we relate to the scribes and Pharisees and then turning from that to Christ so I had some debate even why I had some debate and how do we apply this because we have all this proclaimed against judgment and if you're a Christian this room you may think well that doesn't apply to me and I hope I've addressed that already but also in terms of our closing hymn I want to encourage you with the truth that if you're a Christian today even in ways this is true of you if you put your trust in Jesus Christ you have forgiveness of this you're a child of God and no judgment is going to fall upon you but at the same time I thought it's also appropriate for us as Christians to still confess our sin isn't it and so what I want us to do as we close our service we're going to sing it sing a hymn of confession really a salt from the Psalter of Psalm 51 and so just to give you a heads up as Dave comes up to

lead us in that song we're going to close by seeing a song of confession but also asking asking for mercy from God as Christians we know the source of that mercy don't we it's Christ so my prayer is that as we close this service as you sing that hymn you'll give thought to actually making this a prayer of your own as you sing this Lord I'm confessing my sins before you cleanse me of my sin and make me right in Christ let's pray together dear heavenly father we thank you for your word in the way it does instruct us and

[51 : 43] Lord we also though acknowledge and confess to you that there are ways in which we are like the Pharisees and the scribes and we want to justify ourselves and we want to look at a passage like this and say aha I'm glad I'm not like that guy but oh Lord I pray that you have mercy upon us that you'd show us the true state of our heart that we would know that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked and yet Lord to know that in Christ we've been given a new heart and that you're sanctifying it you're purifying it you're making us like your son and Lord we pray that we would not rest thinking we're already righteous but we'd press on to the goal that we'd seek Lord to be more and more purified in our hearts that we would be putting to death sin by the work of your spirit in us and Lord that you would show us the ways in which we're still hypocritical the ways in which we still fall short but that we would go to Christ find forgiveness in him and Lord grow in addressing these sins through him and through the work of your spirit Lord we pray also for those in the room who don't know you

Lord there are ways that they can relate to this in ways that no Christian in this room can because these woes these judgments fall upon them as well they currently are sitting in a position in which they're a child of hell that they are a serpent and they are a fruit of vipers Lord we pray that you'd have mercy on them that you draw them out of that that you would bring them into salvation this day Lord be with us even now as we see in this closing hand that we would take seriously our sin and that we confess it before you and that we would find the forgiveness that we need in Christ we pray this in his name amen I'll stand to sing him 486 God be merciful to me 486 496 God be merciful to me on thy grace I rest my plea and just in compassion thou on my transgressions now wash me make me pure within cleanse opens me from my sin my transgressions I confess dream and build my soul oppressed I have sinned against thy grace and from a free to thy grace I have sinned against thy grace I have sinned against thy grace I am I am evil born in sin thou desirest truth within thou alone might save I am evil born in sin thou desirest truth within Thou desirest truth within.

Thou alone my Savior art. Teach thy wisdom to my heart.

Make me pure, thy grace bestow. Wash me whiter than the snow.

[55 : 16] O, we're humble to the dust. By thy wrath and judgment just.

Let my contrite heart rejoice. And in gladness hear thy voice. From thy sins, O, by thy face.

God have vowed in boundless grace. Gracious God, my heart renew.

Make my spirit right and true. Cast me not away from thee. Let thy spirit dwell in me.

Thy salvation's joy impart. Steadfast make my willing heart.

[56 : 22] Sinners then shall burn from thee. And return, O God, to thee.

Savior, all my guilt remove. And my tongue shall sing thy love.

Touch my silence, O Lord. And my mouth shall praise the Lord.

Now may the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. Amen.