

Matthew 23:13-24 The Pronouncement of the Eight Woes Part 1

We are in the last three chapters of the third part of Matthew's gospel. Chapters 5 through 25 is The Public Ministry of the Christ. But in the last three chapters of this part, this section, The Prophecies of the End Times - we will be getting into that - The Sermon on Judgment.

Last time we saw in verses 1 through 12 The Practices of the Jewish Leadership. As He gathered together with the crowds and He began to speak His disciples, He warned the people warned the disciples about corrupt authority. Be careful who you listen to. He says the corrupt authority speak the words of Moses from the Word, but they themselves do not do it. So do not do what they do, do what they say.

We saw The Corrupt Motive in verses 5 through 7. In all their works they desire to be seen by men, that is their motive for what they do. They enjoy the first places in the suppers and the first seats in the synagogues. And they love the greetings in the marketplaces. They love it when people say, "Rabbi, Rabbi."

And then in verses 8-10 The Corrupt Character of these people. They enjoy titles that makes them be somebody.

But in verses 11 and 12 The Correct Function, **But the greater of you shall be your servant. And whoever will exalt himself shall be humbled, and whoever will humble himself shall be exalted.** So if you belong to the Lord, the highest elevated position is a servant, a slave to all. And if we attempt to exalt ourselves, we will be humbled, we will be brought low. And whoever will humble himself shall be exalted.

Today we begin a study on verses 13 through 36, The Pronouncement of the Eight Woes.

In verse 13 we have The Condemnation of the First Woe. **But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** Now *woe* does not mean *stop*, as in *Whoa!* That is a different word. *Woe* is a word, **ὠαὶ** (ouai) in Greek, that basically is an expression of grief over the destruction of someone. So Jesus is pronouncing the woe upon the scribes and the Pharisees, because their destruction is about to come.

He calls them hypocrites. The Greek word **ὑποκριτής** (hupokritēs) *hypocrite* is the word for *actor*. Or more specifically somebody who answers according to the script. So He is not just calling them names, He is actually labeling them as actors, people who answer according to the script.

He says, **Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut up the kingdom of Heaven before men; for you yourselves do not enter, nor do you allow the ones entering in to enter.** So you closed up the kingdom of heaven. You have prevented people from coming into the kingdom.

Interesting that Jesus said in Luke 11:52, **Woe to you, lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You entered not in yourselves, and the ones who are entering in you hindered.** So false teachers take away the key of knowledge to enter into the kingdom. You can go, you can sit in the service, but do you get the Word? He says, they keep people from coming in and entering in.

Verse 14, The Condemnation of the Second Woe. Now this verse is not found in some Greek manuscripts. In fact, the manuscripts for which the NIV comes from, the New American Standard, and the ESV (all come from the same manuscript) and they do not contain verse 14 in them. But it is original in Mark 12:40 and in Luke 20:47. And it is of course in the Greek manuscripts for the Textus Receptus, which is what we follow.

Verse 14, The Condemnation of the Second Woe. **Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour the houses of widows and praying at length as a pretext.** So when the widows, women would lose their husbands to death, and they are left with keeping the house and cannot afford it. The leadership of the Jewish nation would come in and they would take the houses away from them, take advantage of the fact that they cannot keep supporting themselves with the house, and they devour the houses of the widows. And, **praying at length as a pretext**, they make long prayers in order to promote themselves as being spiritual, while doing this. So the Lord pronounces woe on them. **And on account of this you will receive more abundant judgment.** What you are doing to these widows - should be compassion and mercy and help. Instead, you make sure their houses are taken away from them and use them for your own profit and gain.

The Condemnation of the Third Woe, verse 15. **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** Actors, people who are just acting according to the script. **For you go around the sea and the dry land to make one proselyte; and whenever he has become so, you make him twofold more a son of Hell, than yourselves.** Strong language. A *proselyte* came to commonly mean an outsider who was brought into a religion. An outsider who is brought into a religion is called a proselyte.

For the Jews, there are two kinds of proselytes. There is a proselyte that would attend the services, but not the celebrations of the feasts, these are called *proselytes of the gate*. But then there is another kind of proselyte called a *proselyte of righteousness*. This is a non-Jewish person who joins full on with Judaism, and they go to all the celebrations, they participate in all of the feasts. Some are even given Jewish names so as to separate them from their past life as a Gentile.

He says, **For you go around sea and dry land to make one proselyte.** The Jews made an extra effort to convert the Gentiles over to being a proselyte, to join Judaism. **And whenever he has become so**, that is, become a proselyte, **you make him twofold more a son of Hell than yourselves.** The word *hell* is the word **γέεννα** (Gehenna). It is the name of the Valley of Hinnom right outside of Jerusalem where they burn the trash. It was constantly burning, and people would bring their garbage and dump it over the side. They would even bring dead bodies of poor people who could not afford a funeral and throw them in to the Valley of Hinnom. And so it is the place of constant burning, which is one of the words used for hell in the New

Testament, and Jesus used it here. That this proselyte has become twice the son of hell than yourself. They become enthused, brand-new, excited, full-on for Judaism and the Law, and twofold more a son of Hell than yourselves.

And The Fourth Woe, verses 16-22. **Woe to you, blind guides.** He changes up here, it does not say, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" But, **Woe to you, blind guides, the one saying, whoever should swear an oath on the Temple, it is nothing, but whoever should swear an oath on the gold of the Temple is indebted.** They had a corrupt oath system. Jesus himself said that there should be no oaths.

In Matthew 5:33-37 Jesus said, **Again, you have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, You shalt not forswear yourself,** as the King James says. But literally, **you shall not break an oath - and shall perform it unto the Lord your oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yes, yes; and No, no: for whatsoever is more than that comes of evil.** Either it is yes or no, you agree or do not agree. You will do it or will not do it. Your word should be all it takes.

Here in our text in Matthew 23, He is addressing the corrupt oath system that the Jews made up. What they did was they took an oath, made a promise to someone to pay someone and they would put their hand on an object. That object would be the object on which they are placing their oath on, that they are going to keep their word. The value of the object depended upon whether they needed to keep their word or not.

So he mentions one here, **Whoever should swear an oath on the Temple, it is nothing but whosoever should swear on the gold of the Temple he is indebted.** So if you put your hand on the Temple and you take an oath and promise someone you are going to pay them, it does not necessarily mean you have to keep your word, because it is the Temple, not the gold of the Temple. If it was the gold of the Temple that you are taking your oath on, then you would have to pay it.

This was all by way of coming to the priests and the leaders in Jerusalem and settling these debts, where one man says, "He took an oath on the Temple that he would pay me, and it came time to pay, and he did not pay." It would be up to the leadership to determine whether the man had to pay or not. And their corrupt oath system said if the oath was taken on the Temple he does not have to pay, he does not have to keep his word. But if he took an oath on the gold of the Temple then he would have to keep his word. Of course, there is some pay in this for the leadership who would make the decision to let the person off to not have to pay the debt.

This twisted logic Jesus goes on to address, **And you say, Whoever should swear an oath on the altar, it is nothing; but whoever should swear an oath on the gift upon it is indebted.** So if you put your hand on the altar, and take an oath, according to their corrupt system you are not indebted. But if you take an oath on the gift that is upon the altar, which they deemed more valuable, then you have to pay the debt, then he is indebted. Jesus goes on to say

in verse 19, **Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift, or the altar which is sanctifying the gift?** If the altar is holding up the gift, then how can the altar not be worth more, or just as much? The same thing with the with the Temple, if you swear on the Temple why is it not worth your word? Why is it worth more than the gold when the Temple holds the gold? So Jesus is showing this twisted logic.

And the one having sworn an oath on the Temple swears on it, and on the One dwelling in it. Go back up to verse 20. **Therefore the one having sworn an oath on the altar, swears on it, and on all things on it. And the one having sworn on the Temple swears on it, and on the One dwelling in it. The one having sworn on Heaven swears an oath on the throne of God, and on the One sitting upon it.** So He says everything eventually winds up in two places, it winds up at the throne of God in Heaven. And we keep our word, it is either we are going to keep our word before God, or we are not. Just as Jesus said in Matthew 5:33-37. So He poked holes in their corrupt oath system. They were just in it for themselves and their own benefit, their own profit, and not ministering making people keep their word.

The Fifth Woe. We will take the fifth woe today and we will take the others next week. The Condemnation of the Fifth Woe, **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and you have left aside the weightier things of the Law: judgment, mercy, and faith. It was necessary to do these, and those not to leave aside.** So He is pronouncing woe again because they tithe, they give ten percent of what work out to be garden herbs used for kitchen spices. And in two places the command in the Old Testament was given to tithe the produce of the field, Leviticus 27:30 and Deuteronomy 14:22. Those required tithes to be paid to the treasurer of Israel from out of the of farm produce. But they tithed more than that. They tithed out of the garden: the spices, the herbs. **Because you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and you have left aside the weightier things of Law.**

What the Jews did, what the leaders did, rabbinical tradition separated the Law into two categories: one was light, and one was heavy. And so if a law was deemed to be light, it was considered to be not one of the weightier issues. But then there are other issues they considered to be weighty, and that is the tithing that he has brought out here. They reduced judgment, mercy, and faith to a lower category, but they exalted tithing, even tithing of produce that was not even mentioned in the Law. But they went over and above the Law to tithe and be spiritual.

It was necessary to do these things, He says, **and those not to leave aside.** So it was necessary to tithe. He is not saying to them under the old covenant, Old Testament, that you do not need to tithe. He is saying, yes, it is necessary to keep the Law, but not leave aside judgment, and mercy, and faith. In fact, they are probably weightier than tithing the mint and dill and cumin.

And then He goes on to say, **Blind guides, the one straining out the gnat, but swallowing the camel!** Verse 24 finishing out this condemnation. Leviticus 11:4 says that the camel was the largest animal of the unclean animals. And Leviticus 11:42 says the gnat is the smallest of the unclean animals. So the gnat and the camel represent the largest and the smallest of unclean animals. And what they would do, is they are very picky about how they went about making sure they did not swallow that gnat, it is unclean. So they would put us a strainer over it,

a filter over their drink so a gnat would not accidentally fall in, and they drink it and they swallowed they gnat. But He says, you are straining at the smallest of these things, yet you are swallowing the largest of it. He is making mention to the fact that they were swallowing the camel. They are rejecting Messiah, the heavier, weightier thing they are rejecting, in order to strain at a gnat.

So, all of this is to show that what God says in His word in I Samuel 16:7 is that **Man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart.** God is concerned about the heart, not the appearance. Religion expresses the outward. Religion emphasizes the outward appearance, whereas God emphasizes the heart. And He says, "Look, you are corrupt in your heart, you are rejecting the Messiah."

Next week we will finish out woe number six, seven, and eight. Along with that, at the end of the chapter we start the prophecies of the end times. So you might want to be there for that. Chapter 24 of Matthew is known for the prophecies of the end time chapter, and we are going to show you how simple, how straightforward it is to understand the prophecies of the end times. Especially in a day and age today when there are lot of prophetic ministries emphasizing certain verses in the Bible about prophecy. And we are going to start taking those starting next week, along with this woe six, seven, and eight, and then after that we will get into Matthew chapter 24, the end time prophecies.

Let's close with prayer.