



Lesson 10 - Hypocritical Pharisees

Matthew Chapter 23 - Verses 1 - 39

Lesson 10

In Matthew 21:21 Jesus enters the temple courts. This begins His confrontation with the rabbis, elders and pharisees who begin by challenging Jesus' authority. Then Jesus rattles off several parables:

The Parable of the Two Sons - Obedience

The Parable of the Tenants - Rebellion

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet - The kingdom of Heaven - "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Then Jesus answered their questions about: paying the imperial tax to Caesar; marriage at the resurrection, the Greatest Commandment and whose son is the Messiah.

This leads us to Chapter 23 - the warnings against hypocrisy. This is our lesson for today. Chapter 23 serves as our foundation for understanding Chapter 24. Chapter 23 warns the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. These are the people who should be leading the people - God's chosen people - the Jews, but instead they had elevated themselves and did not teach what God had instructed them. It was this discussion that leads the disciples to ask Jesus in Chapter 24 about the end times.

The term hypocrite is prominent in this chapter and it fits with our study. It is a term used to describe actors or pretenders of the day. This is critical for us as Christians to understand. We have to KNOW God's Word ourselves. We cannot blindly depend on leaders or teachers to tell us what is right. As we see in the world today many people in the news media feel it is their responsibility to shape the thoughts of their listeners. We see school teachers shaping what they teach to kids to fit their own personal agenda. Recently a school principal was fired because he would not tell students that the holocaust was real. Misinformation is far more prevalent today than information.

Matt. 23:1-2 - Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat."

*Matt. 23:3-4 - "So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. **But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.** They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."*

This is very important for Christians - everyone is watching. In today's world cameras are cheap and therefore they are everywhere! Why do we want cameras everywhere? People cannot be believed. People are trying to do things and get away with it. So, other people and governments are trying to catch people doing something - anything wrong. Even children today are growing up with most of their lives on camera. The monitors in their bedrooms and other rooms in the house so we can keep up with what is going on is numbing people to ubiquitous surveillance. In China we get a glimpse into our future with cameras everywhere.

As Christians, we are expected to do what Jesus has instructed us and to follow God's commands through Moses and the prophets. God sees all and God knows all. God does not need cameras watching us. Jesus is telling the people to do what the Pharisees say but do not do what they do. They do not practice what they preach.

Matt. 23:5-7 - *“Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.”*

When we behave in a way that is for show and is not sincere, God knows. This deceptive practice can lead others astray, not to mention that we are also leading ourselves astray. It is easy to see why Jesus refers to them as hypocrites because they are play acting.

Matt. 23:8-9 - *“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.”*

Matt. 23:10-12 - *“Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

Jesus is reminding them that they have ONE Father - the Lord God and they have ONE teacher and that is Himself - the Messiah. We can be eager and extremely motivated believers and easily fall victim to listening to teachers that and not teaching what God has stated as the truth. It is incumbent on all Christians to seek out the truth themselves. John 14 tells us the truth:

John 14:6-7 - *“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.’”*

The Seven woes on the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. A “woe” is an expression of righteous anger and a pronouncement of impending judgment.

First Woe - Matt. 23:13-14 - *“‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.’”*

An interesting note said that in the Gospel of Thomas (not part of the canon) had this insightful comment about the Pharisees - *“‘Woe to the Pharisee, for they are like a*

dog sleeping in a cattle trough, for it neither eats, nor lets the cattle eat.”

Creating man’s rules as a substitute for God’s rules is dangerous for all concerned. Building man’s rules based on God’s rules is a much better plan.

Second Woe - Matt. 23:15 - “*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.*”

WOW - just when you think the Pharisees have done something right like winning a convert, Jesus hammers them and simultaneously condemns them.

Third Woe - Matt. 23:16 - 17 “*Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.’ You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?*”

Matt. 23:18-19 - “*You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?*”

Matt. 23:20-22 - “*Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.*”

Jesus is trying to help the people understand the difference in what you worship and WHO you worship. As Christians we know that we worship the Creator - not the created.

Fourth Woe - Matt. 23:23-24 - “*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.*”

This is like the mafia or criminal gangs - they would murder and steal and destroy lives through drugs and then donate money to a church or for charitable causes and look like they are doing great but instead they are horrible.

Fifth Woe - Matt. 23:25-26 - *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.”*

Now, Jesus is calling them blind Pharisee. Here they are focused on what looks good but not what IS good. They would fit in well in Hollywood today. But, they are supposed to be the teachers of God’s word. It must be amazing for Jesus, God incarnate, to be face to face with the people He has been trying since the days of Moses to get through to them and now He gets to tell them to their face what He thinks of them.

Sixth Woe - Matt. 23:27-28 - *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”*

According to Old Testament law anyone who came in contact with anything dead was ritually unclean for a week. Touching a dead body was a despicable act for a devout Jew. So, Jesus is telling them that they are full of everything unclean. It is easy to see why the Pharisees did not like Jesus after this encounter. No one has ever talked to them this way before. This is in front of what we would expect to be a large crowd of people since this is Passover week.

Seventh Woe - Matt. 23:29 - 30 - *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’”*

The other woes were in pairs but this woe stands by itself. Jesus condemns them for their ancestors who murdered God’s prophets. When people did not like what God was saying through His prophets they thought that killing the prophets was the best strategy.

Matt. 23:31-32 - *“So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!”*

In this last part - “complete what your ancestors started” is where Jesus knows His future and He knows these are the very people who will kill Him as well. He is planting the thought in the minds of everyone listening that it will be the religious leaders who kill Jesus.

In 33-39 Jesus continues His attack on the ones who will try and convict Him with testimony from liars and then push Pilate to sentence Him to death. Not only this condemnation falls on these Jewish leaders but Jesus will be the judge over them in the second judgment in Revelation.

Matt. 23:33-34 - “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.”

Interesting choice of terms - snakes. Remember it was the serpent in the Garden of Eden that was the one who tempted Eve and then led her to tempt Adam. Then God gave His judgment on snakes in Genesis.

Genesis 3:14-15 - “So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

These snakes are going to strike Jesus so Jesus picked the correct term to describe them.

Matt. 23:35-36 - “And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.”

Jesus has to have them shaking in their sandals as He reveals secrets that only they knew themselves. Jesus is standing before them knowing what will happen in the next 7 days. He knows all the way to the end when He will see each of them again and He will be their judge and then He will never see them again.

Matt. 23:37-39 - *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”*

Jesus is speaking of His time in Heaven before coming to earth how He wanted to gather the Jewish people together and take care of them. He sent many prophets to help them understand. He sent angels to them to explain what is happening and what will happen. Still these are the people who will plot to kill Him. We have to wonder if the Jewish rabbis of today are anything like these Jewish leaders.

In Ezekiel 36:26 - *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”*

This is an end time prophetic event for sure. As we watch for what is happening in Israel, this is a true sign of the end times. When the Jewish people and their leaders start following God and stop trying to deceive the people, we will know that time is near the end.

Now that we this encounter that Jesus has just had with the Jewish leaders in front of the people we look at His explanation to His disciples about His second coming and the end of the age.

Lesson Goals - What did we learn?

