

THE WOES OF THE RELIGIOUSLY MISGUIDED

SCANDALOUS JESUS :THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW, PART 9 · MATTHEW 23:1-38 · APRIL 3, 2022 · PASTOR MATT ERICKSON

"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." (Matthew 23:3)

Three Critiques of Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees (23:1-6)

They are inconsistent (23:3)

They burden people (23:4)

They are concerned with appearances and reputation (23:5-6)

A Contrast for Jesus' Disciples (23:8-12)

Shunning titles and praise from people (23:8-10)

Following Jesus' humble path (23:11-12)

Seven Woes on the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees (23:13-36)

1. They keep people out of God's kingdom (23:13)
2. They make converts who become as misguided as them (23:15)
3. They make oaths that show their blindness about spiritual matters (23:16-22)
4. They practice detailed obedience while disobeying in important matters (23:23-24)
5. They look clean on the outside but are polluted in their inner lives (23:25-26)
6. They look righteous on the outside but are hypocrites on the inside (23:27-28)
7. They stand violently against God's purposes and messengers (23:29-36)

A Lament from Jesus over Jerusalem (23:37-39)

Jesus' desire to gather for healing (23:37)

The reality of impending destruction (23:38-39)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When has someone given you "hard truth" that you needed to hear but was hard to hear? What happened and how did you respond?
2. We continue our series "Scandalous Jesus" by exploring a harsh critique Jesus gives to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees in Matthew 23:1-39. Begin your study in prayer by asking God to speak to you through His Word, and then read that passage aloud.

3. After Jesus has silenced those questioning him (22:46), He speaks to the surrounding crowd about the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. These two groups represent many who had opposed Jesus and, more recently, have begun to hatch a plan to arrest Jesus (21:45-46). What are some of the critiques Jesus levels against them in 23:1-7?
4. Why might it be easy for those who are religious to miss the point of their religion over time?
5. Verses 8-12 seem to be more aimed at Jesus disciples. How does Jesus instruct His followers in taking another way in their relationships and lives?
6. How easy is it for you to live out verses 11-12? Why do you think being humble is hard for us?
7. The next portion (23:13-36) of this passage traces seven "woes" that Jesus speaks against the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. Walk through each of them slowly and try to summarize what each "woe" is about in your own words.
8. One scholar categorizes the woes in this way:
 - Woes 1 & 2 speak of keeping people out of the kingdom
 - Woes 3 & 4 focus on making details of religion more important than substance
 - Woes 5 & 6 contrasts outward and inward purity
 - Woe 7 speaks about complicity in violently opposing God's messengers

Which of the woes stands out most strongly to you personally? Which do you find yourself struggling with, if any?

9. In the final verses (23:37-39), Jesus speaks a lament over Jerusalem. What is Jesus' desire? What is the impending outcome?
10. Do you think it's ever too late for someone to repent and turn back to God? Is that what is happening here or not?
11. What is one thing God is revealing to you about through this study? If you're on your own, write that down, pray over it, and share it with someone this week. If you are with a small group, share your answers with one another before closing in prayer.

DIG DEEPER

This week dig deeper in one or more of the following ways:

- Memorize Matthew 23:11-12.
- Take some time to pray through Matthew 23, letting God reveal any areas where you have gotten off-track in your life with God. Confess and repent of those wrong ways in prayer. If there is someone you need to make things right with, prayerfully reach out to them.
- Prepare for Holy Week by reading Matthew 26 and 27.