

Jesus Rebukes Pharisaism and Laments Over Jerusalem

Matthew 23

Group ¹	C	V	Description
Pharisaism Exposed		1-12	Don't be like the Pharisees who teach but don't do
Eight Woes	23	13-14	Woe 1: shut off the kingdom Woe 2: corruption and pretense
		15	Woe 3: corrupt believers
		16-22	Woe 4: find ways to break oaths and circumvent the law
		23-24	Woe 5: misdirected focus on things as opposed to people
		25-26	Woe 6: place too high a value on ritual
		27-28	Woe 7: being dead on the inside
		29-33	Woe 8: seek to persecute and murder God's prophets
		34-36	Messengers killed and persecuted
Lament over Jerusalem		37-39	Jesus laments over Jerusalem

Reflections

This chapter contains part of one of the extended teaching sections that Matthew includes in his gospel. In this one, Jesus had just been questioned by the Sadducees and Pharisees in which His answers left them stymied and uncharacteristically silent. In this chapter, Jesus is responding to the attitude and actions that are typical of the religious leaders of the day and laments over the future of Jerusalem and their current unwillingness to respond to His message concerning the kingdom of heaven.

Questions

1. Who does Jesus address His remarks toward in this chapter? v1
2. What position does Jesus say the scribes and Pharisees have taken? What might he mean by that? v2-3
3. What does Jesus say that the people should do regarding the things the scribes and Pharisees teach? v3
4. How does Jesus characterize their attitudes towards those they teach and toward their own actions? v4
5. What attitude does Jesus say these Pharisees display in the things that they do? v5
6. What actions of the religious leaders does Jesus call out that reflect an attitude that shouldn't be found among His disciples? v6-8
7. Who does Jesus make clear should be the religious leaders? v9-10
8. What attitude does Jesus say should be taken by people? v11
9. What warning does Jesus give regarding the things He has been teaching about? v12

¹ (NASB) "Group" column from the headings in the NASB text.

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10. What specific actions does Jesus cite in the eight woes that He pronounces against the “scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites”?
 - A. V13
 - B. v14
 - C. v15
 - D. v16-22
 - E. v23-24
 - F. v25-26
 - G. v27-28
 - H. v29-33
11. Who does Jesus say He is going to send and how does He say the religious leaders will respond to them? v34
12. What does Jesus say will fall upon these religious leaders as a result of their actions? v35
13. How soon does Jesus say this will happen? v36
14. How does Jesus describe the contrast between His desire for the people of Jerusalem and their response to His desire? v37
15. What is the result of their continued refusal? v38
16. When does Jesus say they will see Jesus as a result of their attitude? v39

Conclusion

Jesus’ frustration with the religious leaders of the day, and of the many generations preceding them, comes to a head and He rebukes their hypocritical lifestyles and the burdens they heap up on people making it impossible for anyone to please God. He summarizes the attitudes He hates which typify their lives in the eight woes. Verse 14 isn’t included in all manuscripts so some bibles might refer to seven woes.

Hendriksen² makes an acrostic out of the word SCRIBES to summarize these attitudes.

- S. hut the door of the kingdom in men’s faces (verse [Mat 23:13](#));
- C. orrupt proselytes, after having, with great effort, won them over to the Jewish religion (verse [Mat 23:15](#));
- R. everse the truth regarding the oath, as if the gold of the temple were more important than the temple; and the gift upon the altar, than the altar, so that swearing by the temple and by the altar would not be binding (verses [Mat 23:16-22](#));
- I. nvert values, as if tithing small flavoring herbs were of greater significance than practicing justice, mercy, and faithfulness, and as if straining out the gnat were obligatory even though it meant swallowing the camel (verses [Mat 23:23-24](#));

² (Hendriksen)

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- B. oost ritual, as if the ritualistic cleansing of cup and plate were to be preferred to exercising *a.* honesty in obtaining what goes into these, and *b.* self-control in consuming the contents (verses [Mat 23:25-26](#));
- E. xternalize religion, as if outward appearance were an adequate cover for sham and crime (verses [Mat 23:27-28](#)); and
- S. wagger about their superior goodness, as if they were better than their ancestors, who killed the prophets (verses [Mat 23:29-32](#)).

If we contrast this with the topics found in the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7, we would find many of the same topics. However, Jesus is promoting the opposite of these attitudes and actions.

This chapter should be seen as a reminder for us to make sure that we maintain an attitude of humility and service to others so that we might be found faithful in the end.

There and Then: Here and Now

Answer the questions below as you reflect on your own life and this part of our study³: *my LOG vs others SPECK. Here are some possible responses I've identified from the text that might apply to anyone.*

S - Are there *sins* for me to avoid or confess?

•

P - Are there *promises* from God for me to claim?

•

E - Are there *examples* for me to follow or avoid?

•

C - Are there *commands* for me to obey?

•

K - How has this passage increased my *knowledge* about God / Jesus / Holy Spirit?

•

³ *Navigator Bible Study Handbook* (The Navigators), with additions & Matthew 7:1-5.

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Response to Questions

1. Jesus addresses His remarks toward the crowds and His disciples. Most likely Jesus is teaching in the temple complex area which would have been more crowded than usual in the days leading up to Passover.
2. Jesus says that they have “seated themselves in the seat of Moses.” That is they have placed themselves in a position that was occupied by Moses as the leaders of the people. We also find from verse 3 that they had taken up the responsibility of teaching God’s people.
3. Jesus tells the crowds to do and observe all that they teach but don’t follow their examples in living because they don’t do what they teach.
4. They instruct people to do things that they would never even consider doing, thus making following God’s law a heavy burden that they are unwilling to carry themselves.
5. They do things only to be noticed by men, i.e. the use of phylacteries and tassels on their garments. External things that called attention to them.
6. The actions and attitudes are the following.
 - A. Seats of honor at public gatherings
 - B. Public acknowledgment of their position by the way they are greeted
 - C. Special titles reflecting their position and respect
7. There is only one Father that is God in Heaven and there is really only one Leader who is Christ. This is the Greek word for Messiah.
8. There is to be an attitude of humility and service to others displayed in the lives of those who would seek to honor God in their lives.
9. The warning Jesus gives is that self-exaltation will be humbled and a person with a humble attitude will be commended.
10. Jesus cites the following examples against the “scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites”?
 - A. V13—They hinder themselves and other people from entering heaven by their actions and teaching
 - B. v14—They take advantage of widows and make long prayers for pretense
 - C. v15—They go to great lengths to convert someone but then teach him to be just like you in action and attitude
 - D. v16-22—They seek to find ways to circumvent the law and not have to keep it, thus rendering themselves “blind guides”
 - E. v23-24—They keep the tithes of the smallest things but fail to help those who are in need
 - F. v25-26—They place too high a value on ritual and externally they appear very religious, but internally are self-indulgent and thieves
 - G. v27-28—They are look good on the outside but are dead on the inside

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- H. v29-33—They make a great display for honoring prophets but would have been willing to participate in their murder and persecution if they had been alive.
11. Jesus is going to send “prophets and wise men and scribes” and they will treat them in the same way as the prophets of old, thus showing their true natures.
 12. Jesus declares that “all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah” would fall on them. In this way Jesus was noting the death of all God’s people who were murdered from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end.⁴
 13. Jesus declares that the events He just described will happen within the current generation, which it did with the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in ad 70 and the complete overthrow of the Jewish people by ad 73.
 14. Jesus wants to gather them together and protect them but they keep refusing to accept His invitation.
 15. The people have always had the choice follow after Jesus or not. God gives us free will but His desire is for us to follow Him and He has predetermined what the consequences would be for those who choose not to follow Him.
 16. Jesus will no longer be present among them until He comes to establish the kingdom forever. It is interesting that Jesus quotes the very passage that many were shouting just a few days earlier when He entered the city of Jerusalem in what we call the Triumphal Entry.

Key Words: New Testament, Gospels, Matthew, Jesus, Pharisees, Jerusalem, Woe, Hypocrisy, Humility



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4 (Walton et al.; MacDonald and Farstad; Henry; Hendriksen; Wiersbe) Most all commentators hold this view that Jesus is referring to the arrangement of the books in the Hebrew Bible, which is different than the arrangement we have in Christian bibles.

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