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MATTHEW

A FORM OF GODLINESS

MATTHEW 23

I. Harsh Words

- a. Matthew 23 contain the harshest recorded words of Jesus in the all the gospels
 - i. Directly following a section in Matthew that begins with Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem
 - ii. And His first act after the triumphant entry into Jerusalem - The cleansing of the temple
 - iii. And then cursing fig tree
 - iv. 3 parables
 1. ***“Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.”***
 2. ***“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.”***
 3. ***“Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”***
 - a. ***“they perceived that He was speaking of them”***
 - v. 4 questions
 1. That only further humiliate those who asked the questions - (questioned Him no more)
- b. Why is Jesus so hard on these religious leaders?
 - i. Men of God, protectors of the law, sons of Abraham, leaders of God’s chosen people – living righteous, moral lives (unlike the tax collectors and prostitutes)

Matt 23:1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. 3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. 4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. 5 But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. 6 They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi.’ 8 But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. 11 But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Matt 23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. 14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. 15 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when

he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. 16 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.’ 17 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 18 And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.’ 19 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? 20 Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. 21 He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. 22 And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it. 23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. 24 Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! 25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. 27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. 28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. 29 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’ 31 Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. 33 Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? 34 Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, 35 that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation

II. Blessing and Woe

a. Understanding the heart of Jesus

- i. These are the harshest words ever spoken by Jesus – so harsh that some claim He never said them, that it is too out of character
 1. “Woe” is a judgement full of sorrow. In the Old Testament it was the cry of many of the prophets over Israel when they had turned their back on the Lord
 2. *Mat 23:37 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”*

b. Matthew opened Jesus’ public teaching with the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 “Blessed” and this is just the other side of the same coin

- i. Blessed are the merciful (5:7) woe to those who neglect mercy (23:23); blessed are the pure in heart (5:8) woe to those who clean their cups and ignore their souls; blessed are those who are persecuted for my sake (5:10-12) woe to those who kill them.
- ii. What God stands against is rooted in what God stands for – what God despises is rooted in what God loves

1. People fixate on what God opposes without acknowledging what He has provided
2. The warning against an open fire in the living room and the benefit of an open flame in the kitchen – boundaries are for our good

III. The Hypocrisy of the Pharisees

a. The Seat of Moses

- i. To sit in Moses' seat was to be an authority on the Mosaic Law.
 1. Jesus says, "whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do" – now you can see the Pharisees nodding. Okay, this guy is finally getting it
 2. **But do not do what they do, because they do not practice what they preach**
- ii. This is exactly what Paul is communicating in his 2nd letter to Timothy ***2 Tim 3:1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!***
- b. Instead of making a way for the Messiah, they stood in the way.
 - i. ***Matt 23:13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.***
 - ii. Instead of being changed from the inside out, they focused on the outside while who they were on the inside remained untouched – that is having a form of godliness, but denying its power
 - iii. That is why His first act was cleansing and restoring the temple - Exactly as Malachi promised, ***"The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple"*** (Mal 3:1) and when He arrives He will judge
 1. Those who cheat the widow and the orphan and turn the stranger away (Mal 3:5).
 - iv. Jesus drives out the money changers: ***"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'*** – a hideout where thieves feel safe
 1. These were the same men that saw what was going on in temple – Jesus healing the blind and lame, the children crying Hosanna, and the chief – and their response - tell them to stop!
 - v. This why He curses the fig tree to provide a living parable, this is why He shares parables of wicked men killing the messengers
 1. What made them dangerous was not their sinfulness – we are all sinful – but their sinfulness shrouded in spirituality
- c. Lest we think – I'm glad I'm not like them – Jesus initially is speaking to the crowds and the disciples
 - i. After Jesus' death and resurrection - Many in the early church were wondering: if Jesus is Israel's Messiah, why did their leaders reject Him?
 1. Matthew's answer: hasn't that always been the pattern with Israel
 2. Messengers are sent, rejected, and killed
 - ii. Matthew never shies away from hypocrisy even with the disciples (7:21-23; 24:51).

1. If we read chapter 23 feeling superior to the Pharisees, we are praying the Pharisee's prayer: ***"God, I thank You that I am not like other men"*** (Luke 18:11).
2. Jesus words are just as serious for us as they were for the religious leaders
- iii. **The single greatest danger to the church's mission** is not Hollywood, a political party, or the culture – it is men and women with a form of godliness who deny its power.
 1. William Barclay called it theatrical goodness: outward goodness with hidden agendas, using the gospel for personal gain

IV. Do What They Say, Not What They Do

a. Marks of a Pharisee

- i. Heavy burdens (v.4) – the "what"
- ii. An overencumbered animal – a donkey so weighed down its legs are ready give out.
- iii. Experts at shame and guilt, and making people feel helpless but unwilling to provide what the people needed most - help
- iv. Peter calls it ***"a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear"*** (Acts 15:10)
 1. ***Ezek 34:2 "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"***
 2. Burdens placed on others are one of the quickest ways to feel righteous: the rule is for them, the grace is for me

b. The Pharisees bind burdens and walk away. Jesus uses the very same word (In all these judgements we learn something about Jesus)

- i. ***Matt 11:28-30 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."***
- ii. ***Matt 9:36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*** They had religious leaders, houses of worship, an entire system – and still no shepherd
- iii. ***1 Pet 5:7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*** The Pharisees added burdens; Jesus lifted them. His disciples are to do the same: ***Gal 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.***

c. To be seen by men

- i. Phylacteries (leather boxes with Torah verses, tied on head and arm) and tassels were commanded
- ii. The sin was enlarging them – using the superficial to project significance
- iii. The front seats in the synagogue faced the congregation. Everything was theatrical

d. Titles and authority

- i. Rabbi, Father, Teacher – titles of authority. Jesus is not rejecting respect for teachers; He is reminding us there is only One who is the final authority
 1. Paul could say "follow me as I follow Christ" because Jesus was his authority. The Pharisees were their own
- ii. The heart that loves a title is a heart that needs the title to feel secure in their identity

1. What about Jesus. Jesus is our Lord, Savior, and King and yet He calls us brothers and friends
- iii. The self-righteous will never be comfortable serving Jesus in anonymity: Jesus can get the glory as long as I am getting some too
 1. What are our phylacteries and borders? Titles, the letters after our names, the car we drive, the names we drop, the verses we've memorized...
 2. What are the superficial ways we try to project our importance?
 3. The desire to be seen is a desire for approval, and we look for it from whoever is watching
 4. ***John 12:43 For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.***
 - a. A.W. Tozer – *"The church has turned the text into a formula... It is now possible to have every form of godliness and lose the power, to keep every form of worship and lose the Presence those forms were meant to carry. We have engineered the feeling of God's presence without the reality of His person."*

V. Jesus – the Shepherd the People Needed

- a. The religious leaders and Jesus
 - i. Shut the kingdom - He opens it. "I am the door"
 - ii. Make sons of hell - He makes children of God and points people to the Father
 - iii. Blind guides, broken oaths - He gives sight and is the Faithful and True Witness
 - iv. Neglect justice, mercy, faith - He is just, merciful, and faithful
 - v. Clean outside, filthy inside - He is holy and undefiled and He cleanses us
 - vi. Whitewashed tombs - He touches the dead and gives life
 - vii. Kills the prophets - He is the Prophet who is killed, and He prays, "Father, forgive them"
- b. We are left with these questions
 - i. Do I make it harder to come to Jesus than He made it for me?
 - ii. Do I want to make disciples of Jesus or make followers of me?
 - iii. Do I keep the outside clean while neglecting the inside? I can change the outside, only Jesus can change the heart
 - iv. When I'm struggling with doubt or confusion, do I still try project confidence instead?
 - v. If I've fallen into habitual sin, do I tell no one and overcompensate? Am I incredibly hard on others so to take the attention off myself?
 1. It was the role of the Pharisees that Jesus opposed it was the hypocrisy
 2. He doesn't expect sinlessness, He expects honesty