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Sermon Notes

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## **Christ Exposes Spiritual Hypocrites, Part II**

**Matthew 23:23-33**

### I. The Danger of Hypocrisy

One of the Scariest Passages in the Bible

***Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'***

Think of it... these are people who thought they had the spiritual credentials for heaven... they thought they knew Jesus well; they say “Lord, Lord” as though they are excited to see Him and are certain He is excited to see them; they have all these supposed good works, even miracles... but He says these chilling words

“I never knew you... away from me, you evildoers”

They were gospel hypocrites... and they will be shocked on Judgment Day to find out their terrifying destiny... eternity apart from the Lord, who declares their fate: **AWAY FROM ME**

But it is clear they should not be shocked

Jesus calls them “evildoers”... their pattern of life declared their true nature

Jesus is a spiritual physician, and His diagnosis is perfect

If you bring your soul to Him and allow Him to probe you and search you and test you and expose you NOW, you need not be shocked on Judgment Day

If you focus your heart on Christ, and concern yourself NOW about what HE thinks, He will save you

But if you decide to play a religious game, to posture and play Christian, to shine up the outside and be corrupt on the inside, He will expose you on Judgment Day... and then it will be too late

In Matthew 23, Jesus confronts the Scribes and Pharisees with their hypocrisy

We would be wise to sit under this scathing chapter and allow it to search us and know us and reveal us and expose us

For the third week, we come face to face with the issue of hypocrisy

In sharing the gospel, I have occasionally had the following said to me by non-Christians: "Churches are just filled with hypocrites"

After having heard that charge, one time I decided to challenge the co-worker who said it to me: "What is a hypocrite?" I asked him.

He answered "Someone who doesn't practice what they preach." [He didn't realize He was quoting Jesus in Matthew 23!!]

I said to him, "You mean someone who espouses a moral standard but fails to live up to it?" He said "Yeah, that's right!"

I asked him, "Do you have a moral standard?"

He said "Of course."

I asked "What kind of morals are in your standard?" He began to list some things like "Treating other people with respect, helping people, being a hard worker" I'm not sure where he got his list of morals, but there it was.

Then I asked, "Do you live up to these things perfectly?" "No, not perfectly... I try, though"

"So, you espouse a standard you can't keep?"

He answered, "Okay, I see where you're going."

Church is where we should go to BE CURED of hypocrisy

Christ wants us to have a GENUINE walk with Him, a GENUINE love for God, to be GENUINELY SAVED from our sins

That is the issue in front of us today as we look again at Matthew 23

Christians should be aware of the deadly danger of hypocrisy and be crying out to the Lord, "Deliver me from pride, from caring more what man thinks of me than what you think of me... deliver me from hypocrisy!!"

## II. Overview of Christ's Condemnation

### A. The Bitterest of all Christ's Teachings

### B. Our Day and Age: Toleration

### C. Context

1. The Gospel of Matthew has one uniting theme: The Kingdom of Heaven... or, more specifically, Jesus' credentials as the KING of the Kingdom of Heaven
2. Final week of Jesus' life:
  - a. Triumphal entry... riding on a donkey, He is acclaimed by all to be the Messiah, the Son of David
  - b. The cleansing of the Temple: Jesus, filled with the zeal of God, makes a whip and drives out all the thieves who have turned the temple into a wicked marketplace
  - c. Jesus' enemies, bitterly shocked by His attacks, go on the offensive themselves
    - i) They demand to know His credentials... by what authority He was cleansing the temple; by what authority He was teaching in the temple
    - ii) They make plots against Him; terrified of the crowd on the one hand, terrified of the Romans on the other, they struggle to find some way, legally or illegally to have Jesus murdered
3. Matthew 22: Jesus' enemies organize and attack
  - a. First the Pharisees and Herodians ask about taxation... ***"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"*** The goal is to get Jesus in trouble with either the Romans or the crowd
  - b. Then the Sadducees ask about the resurrection
  - c. Then the teacher of the Law asks about the greatest commandment in the Law
  - d. Now here in Matthew 23, Jesus goes on the attack
    - i) Three central roles in the OT: PROPHET PRIEST KING
    - ii) Jesus here is the classic prophet, declaring the word WOE over their case

iii) OT prophets used this word WOE as a terrifying warning of impending judgment

#### D. Overview

##### 1. Who were the “Scribes and Pharisees”??

- a. The Pharisees were a sect of the Jews who were extremely conscientious about keeping every detail of the Law; they believed that righteousness came from meticulously obeying every aspect of the Laws of Moses... and that they HAD obeyed every aspect
- b. The “scribes” were responsible to copy the Law of Moses by hand; They would teach their insights in the Law as equally important to the Law itself... and they approached religion in the same self-righteous spirit as the Pharisees: I am righteous because I obey God’s Law well enough to be saved!!

##### 2. Matthew 23: Jesus’ attack in a rhythmic cadence punctuated by one phrase over and over:

***“Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites...!!”***

Here Jesus proclaims a SEVEN-FOLD woe on the Scribes and Pharisees... the number seven may be significant... it is a number of prophetic perfection or completion... like Jesus is saying “YOU ARE COMPLETELY CONDEMNED!!!!”

##### 3. Astonishing perceptiveness... Jesus probes their hearts for the true condition of their hearts

***Luke 16:15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts.***

- a. Again and again it is made clear that Jesus knows men’s hearts

***John 2:23-25 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. <sup>25</sup> He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man***

- b. This is a heart exposure of these spiritual hypocrites
- c. Hypocrites = actors, those who appear to be one thing but are not
- d. At root is Jesus’ ability to know the true condition of every man’s heart... and it is clear that Judgment Day will be a matter of the HEART... the true motives of the HEART... what proceeds from the HEART

***Hebrews 4:13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.***

### III. The Seven Woes

#### A. Woe for Shutting Seekers Out of Heaven

***Vs. 13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.***

1. Simply put... following them as spiritual leaders DID NOT LEAD to the Kingdom of Heaven

***You yourselves do not enter...***

- a. Jesus calls them blind guides; He says to leave them

***Matthew 15:14 Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."***

- b. In another place, He makes it plain that their righteousness is insufficient to enter the Kingdom of Heaven

***Matthew 5:20 I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.***

- c. They reduced the Laws of God to a system of works established by the traditions of men; it was overwhelming and comprehensive, but it was doable (kind of, as long as you were willing to be a hypocrite)
- d. AND it left the heart unchanged... the heart was unregenerate, and unrighteous
- e. Thus they missed the point of the Law of God... it was designed to crush pride and make the sinner beg for mercy; the Scribes and Pharisees reduced it to a religious machinery that was designed to produce pride for the successful and despair for the unsuccessful

2. Legalism fails BEFORE GOD

***Matthew 5:48 "You must be PERFECT as your heavenly Father is perfect!"***

#### B. Woe for Making Hellish Disciples

***Vs. 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 he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.***

### C. Woe for Being Blind Guides

**vs. 16-22** *"Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.'* <sup>17</sup> *You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?* <sup>18</sup> *You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.'* <sup>19</sup> *You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?* <sup>20</sup> *Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.* <sup>21</sup> *And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it.* <sup>22</sup> *And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.*

### D. Woe for Inverting God's Priorities

**Vs. 23-24** *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices-- mint, dill and cummin. 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.* <sup>24</sup> *You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.*

1. Tithing: Commanded in the Old Testament
2. Pharisees went BEYOND the commandment to some degree, and were certainly proud of that!
  - a. Gave a tenth of their spices...
  - b. Picture them in the kitchen, counting off tiny little mint leaves... "Nine for me, one for God... nine for me, one for God"
  - c. This sums up their whole legalistic approach to life... carefully measuring out every tiny thing to be sure it met the literal requirements of the Laws of Moses
  - d. At one level, there's nothing wrong with being ATTENTIVE TO DETAILS

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 16:10** *"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.*

- e. God is certainly attentive to details

**Matthew 10:29** *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.*

**Matthew 12:36** *But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken.*

f. Jesus Himself says they were RIGHT to tithe their mint leaves

***“You should have practiced the latter WITHOUT neglecting the former”***

3. BUT... there are clearly different levels of God’s commands... And our top priorities should be God’s top priorities

***Matthew 23:23 you have neglected the more important matters of the law-- justice, mercy and faithfulness.***

- a. Justice: God’s law reflects His own passion for justice, and commands that we be just in our dealings as well
- b. Mercy: the quality of God that is our only hope for salvation—that God will not deal with us as our sin deserves; God’s Law then commands that we be merciful to other sinners as we hope God will be merciful to us
- c. Faithfulness: keeping faith with others; dealing properly with human relationships, keeping your promises

The Scribes and Pharisees were inequitable, unfair, unjust, unmerciful, brutal, unforgiving, unkind, greedy, and abusive of others...

So while they were counting out their mint leaves and dill and cumin, and feeling so self-righteous doing it, they looked abominable in God’s eyes

Jesus sums it up perfectly:

***“You strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!!”***

E. Woe for External Cleanness But Internal Greed

***Vs. 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.***

1. The next two woes have one thing in common: the Pharisees’ tendency to put on an outward show while neglecting the internal truth
  - a. This is a consistent warning from Christ and from His apostles
  - b. The ravenous beasts that are false teachers are outwardly attractive... but inwardly wicked

***Matthew 7:15 ¶ "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.***

***2 Corinthians 11:13-15 such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an***

*angel of light.* <sup>15</sup> ***It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.***

2. The Scribes and Pharisees lived for EXTERNAL SHOW... and had abundant and intricate washing rituals for cups, pots, pans, hands, etc.
  - a. Such rituals were a symbol of the purity of life that God desires
  - b. But they are meaningless when done by hypocrites
3. What is the sense of washing the outside of a cup, but leaving rancid grease on the inside??
4. Look at what Christ accuses them of:
  - a. Greed... or literally ROBBERY... like extortion

***Luke 20: 47 They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."***

- b. Self-indulgence...lack of self-control; unrestrained self-indulgence; they were plundering the people spiritually and materially
5. For the FIFTH and last time in the chapter, Jesus uses the word "BLIND" to describe them... they are blind to the foolishness and hypocrisy of their wicked ways

***Vs. 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.***

#### F. Woe for External Purity But Internal Pollution

***Matthew 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 dead men's bones and everything unclean. <sup>28</sup> In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.***

1. Just like the last woe, Jesus accuses the Scribes and Pharisees of a major discrepancy between external show and internal truth
2. Here He calls them WHITEWASHED TOMBS that look beautiful on the outside but inside is full of dead men's bones and everything unclean
3. He accuses them of outward piety combined with internal wickedness
4. How different from what God truly desires:



***Psalm 51:6 Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.***

***Psalm 24:3-4 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? <sup>4</sup> He who has clean hands and a pure heart***

G. Woe for Honoring Dead Prophets While Murdering Living Ones

***Matthew 23:29-32 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. <sup>30</sup> And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' <sup>31</sup> So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. <sup>32</sup> Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!***

1. The last of the Seven woes is quite revealing... more display of spiritual pride
2. Hindsight is 20-20, the old saying goes
3. The past righteous people often appear very appealing, especially the prophets of old
  - a. We can celebrate the piety of Elijah and his boldness... but would we have listened to his fiery message calling on us to repent of our idolatry?
  - b. We can delight in the zeal of Moses for the Law of God, but would we have murmured against him, talked of stoning him, and yearned to go back to Egypt as they did?
  - c. We can embrace the burning and shining light of John the Baptist, but would we have yielded to his fiery denunciation of sin and melted before him in humility? Or would we have sought to have him killed as Herod did when John pointed out his adultery with Herodias?
  - d. Closer to home, we honor the missionaries like William Carey and Adoniram Judson, but both of them were vigorously spoken against in their day by "good Christian folk". Would we have been among their detractors or supporters?
  - e. We celebrate the courage of William Wilberforce in the movement to abolish slavery... but do we support the modern pro-life leaders who seem more unappealing and radical to us?
4. It is always easier to be righteous in THEORY than in practice... and to decorate the tombs of the righteous prophets is to say "We are BETTER than those who killed them!" Especially when the Scribes and Pharisees exemplified the SHALLOW RELIGION the prophets came to expose and rebuke

5. Jesus exposes these men as rejecting their own generation's righteous men and prophets: they hated John the Baptist, they hate Jesus, and they will hate and persecute the Apostles when Jesus sends them forth
6. And, in next week's sermon, I will discuss Jesus' prophecy of their future persecution of the church

***Matthew 23:34 Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.***

#### IV. Discovering and Killing Our Own Hypocrisy

A. The Danger of Gospel Hypocrisy... Means the Need for Self-Examination

***2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-- unless, of course, you fail the test?***

***1 Corinthians 11:28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.***

***2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure***

B. Distinction in Kinds of Hypocrisy

1. Hypocrisy in True Christians: failure to live up to the sanctified life taught in the Bible
2. Hypocrisy in False Christians: claiming to be a Christian when you're not

C. How Satan Deceives True Christians About Hypocrisy

1. It is true that we espouse a standard we do not live up to
  - a. We say that we should love God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength... but we fail... in one sense, then, we are hypocrites
  - b. We say that we should love our neighbor as ourselves... but so often we love ourselves more than our neighbors... in one sense, then, we are hypocrites
2. We all have masks by which we present ourselves to the outside world as better than we are
  - a. Better in our personal lives... better in personal holiness... better in our spiritual disciplines than we really are

- b. Better husbands and wives than we really are... better parents and children than we really are
  - c. All of us tend to sew the fig leaves of morality over our flawed hearts and flawed habits
3. But Satan uses these sins, this failure to live up to the perfection Christ commands as grounds to accuse us concerning our STATE before God
- a. He is the “accuser of the brethren”...
  - b. Zechariah 3: He stands against the High Priest Joshua to accuse him of his sins; the Lord rebukes him

Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*

Though Satan can never rob a believer of his crown, yet such is his malice and envy, that he will leave no stone unturned, no means unattempted, to rob them of their comfort and peace – to make their life a burden and a hell unto them, to cause them to spend their days in sorrow and mourning, in sighing and complaining, in doubting and questioning. 'Surely,' he says, 'we have no interest in Christ; our graces are not true, our hopes are the hopes of hypocrites; our confidence is our presumption, our enjoyments are our delusions.'

**DEVICE 1.** The first device that Satan has to keep souls in a sad, doubting, and questioning condition, and so making their life a hell, is, **By causing them to be still poring and musing upon sin, to mind their sins more than their Savior**

There is a difference between sin VEXING or TROUBLING a soul and sin REIGNING over a soul:

Thomas Brooks: Now sin **reigns** in the soul, when the soul willingly and readily obeys it, and submits to its commands, as subjects do actively obey and embrace the commands of their prince. The commands of a king are readily embraced and obeyed by his subjects—but the commands of a tyrant are embraced and obeyed unwillingly. All the service that is done to a tyrant, is out of violence, and not out of loving obedience. A free and willing subjection to the commands of sin speaks out the soul to be under the reign and dominion of sin; but from this plague, this hell, Christ frees all believers. It is a sign that sin has not gained your consent—but committed a rape upon your souls, when you cry out to God. If the ravished virgin under the law cried out—she was guiltless (Deut. 22:27); so when sin plays the tyrant over the soul, and the soul cries out, it is guiltless; those sins shall not be charged upon the soul.

D. John Flavel: Questions to know whether or not we are gospel hypocrites:

1. Do I make the approval of God or the applause of men the end and main design of my religious acts?

2. Am I more concerned with the trouble that sin may cause me in this world or with the dishonor that sin brings to the name of God? Do I hate sin more for its potential danger to me in this world or for its inherent wickedness and evil? [If you could completely get away with sin, with no effects to you personally, would you do it? A mark of genuine Christianity is to know for certain that your sins are forgiven through the shed blood of Christ and to HATE SIN all the more and FIGHT SIN all the more vigorously because of Christ]
3. Do I truly rejoice from the heart over the success of God's work in the world, and His glory displayed by others even if I get absolutely no credit for it or it has nothing directly to do with me at all?
4. Do I desire to do ALL of the duties and actions of the Christian life, even if they may be difficult and costly? Do I rise up with readiness and eagerness to do something that I realize God wants me to do, even if it requires sacrifice? Do I delight in those duties and responsibilities of the gospel, and see them as delightful, even if I can't seem to carry them out well?
5. Am I sincerely resolved to follow Christ and holiness in all circumstances of my life, even if it is unpopular with surrounding culture? Or do I carry myself so warily and covertly as to shun all dangers and difficulties which may come to me, holding a secret reserve in my heart to venture out in Christianity no further than I may return with safety?
6. Do I make no conscience of committing secret sins or omitting secret duties, or do I seek to carry out the secret aspects of my Christian faith—personal holiness in secret?

#### E. Jonathan Edwards: Hypocrites Deficient in Private Prayer

Doctrine: However hypocrites may continue for a season in the duty of prayer, yet it is their manner, after a while, in a great measure, to leave it off.

We are often taught, that the seeming goodness and piety of hypocrites is not of a lasting and persevering nature. It is so with respect to their practice of the duty of prayer in particular, and especially of secret prayer. They can omit this duty, and their omission of it not be taken notice of by others, who know what profession they have made. So that a regard to their own reputation doth not oblige them still to practice it. If others saw how they neglect it, it would exceedingly shock their charity towards them. But their neglect doth not fall under their observation; at least not under the observation of many. Therefore they may omit this duty, and still have the credit of being converted persons.

Men of this character can come to a neglect of secret prayer by degrees without very much shocking their peace.

#### F. Helps Against the Sin of Hypocrisy (John Bunyan)

1. Believe that God's eye is always upon your heart to observe all the ways, all the turnings and windings of it

***Revelation 2:23 Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds***

2. Believe that He observes all your ways and actions

***Proverbs 5:21 For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths.***

3. Believe that there is a day of judgment coming, and that then all things shall be revealed and discovered as they are

***Luke 12:2-3 There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. <sup>3</sup> What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.***

4. Believe that a hypocrite, with the cunning and shrouds for his hypocrisy, can go unseen no further than the grave, nor can he longer flatter himself with thoughts of life

***Job 20:5-8 the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? <sup>6</sup> Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; <sup>7</sup> Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he? <sup>8</sup> He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night.***

5. Believe that God will not spare a hypocrite in the judgment, nor punish him with ordinary damnation

***Luke 20:46-47 Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, <sup>47</sup> who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.***

[literally "extraordinary, remarkable condemnation"]

6. Remember: of all sins, the sin of hypocrisy bespeaks a man most in love with some lust, because he lies before God and man in order to keep his lust