

**>>>>>> Matthew – Lesson 45 <<<<<<<**

- 1) Jesus has finished addressing the crowds and His disciples concerning the scribes and the Pharisees.
- 2) Next, He turns directly to the scribes and Pharisees themselves in His address and He begins the actual seven “Woe’s” to the Pharisees.
- 3) “Woe” is a term that warns of judgment to come but also conveys a feeling of regret because the listeners refuse to repent.
- 4) One further point that I would like to make is brought out by Barney Kasdan in his book, “Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah: A Messianic Commentary”:

We must view Yeshua in the same spirit as the prophets of Israel, speaking as a concerned Jew to fellow Jews, not as an outsider with an anti-Jewish grudge.<sup>47</sup>

- 5) Kasdan also points out that these woes are not pointed at all Pharisees, only the group that fit the mold Jesus is portraying.
  - a) As we have discussed before, there were likely many Pharisees who were God fearing and God loving Jewish leaders who did not exhibit these characteristics.
- 6) Ok let’s begin with the first woe ...

**Matthew 23:13–15(ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. <sup>15</sup> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

- 7) The term hypocrite in the first verse describes the Pharisees’ failure to live up to the responsibility they have as teachers and interpreters of the Law.
  - a) They painstakingly obey every small detail of the Law but have no thought or concern for the people they shepherd and teach having a right relationship with God.
  - b) They lock people out of the kingdom by rejecting Jesus and while continuing to emphasize their petty demands on the people and the effect it was having.
  - c) This verse 13 highlights a very serious issue.
    - i) It is one thing to not accept Jesus and by doing so, shut ourselves out of a relationship with God and salvation itself – however, it is quite another issue altogether to cause others to lose their souls, by doing so.
    - ii) This is exactly what Jesus is saying these Pharisees are doing.
  - d) We must always remember that our actions always have effects on others.
    - i) It would be a truly terrible thing if, by our actions, we caused someone to walk away from Jesus – definitely something to think about.
- 8) Ok, before we move on, we have another of those “variances.”

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<sup>47</sup> Barney Kasdan, [\*Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah: A Messianic Commentary\*](#) (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2011), 267–268.

- a) Verse 14 is not in most current translations except the NKJV and the KJV. It reads:

**Matthew 23:14 (NKJV)**

<sup>14</sup> **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.**

- b) The verse is another of those that is not in the earlier and attested manuscripts. Most scholars believe that the manuscripts that have it have borrowed it from Mark 12:40.
- c) Without spending a lot of time, we can definitely say that it fits in Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees as being hypocrites.
- 9) Looking at vs. 15 (the second woe), focuses on the Pharisees perverting their own converts.
- a) Complete conversion to Judaism involved a process of commitment followed by formal incorporation into the Jewish people.
- i) The prospective convert first accepted Israel's God, rejected pagan gods, and committed himself to Jewish religious practices and the Torah.
- ii) For a male Gentile seeking full conversion, circumcision was the decisive physical sign of entering the covenant and being incorporated into the Jewish people.
- (1) Ritual immersion also appears to have been associated with formal conversion, although the precise procedure in the first century is less certain than the later rabbinic practice.
- b) To be clear, as we look through the New Testament, we must always remember, these "prostiles" were different than the God fearers we see in Acts and elsewhere.
- c) The God fearers were probably introduced to Jewish belief through contact with Jewish communities.
- i) Perhaps through synagogues, Jewish friends, merchants, households, etc., and then voluntarily embraced Israel's God without taking the final step of conversion.
- ii) Definitely different than the proselytes Jesus is talking about here.
- d) Jesus goes on to say that once this process is complete, these Pharisees make the converted person **"twice as much a child of hell"** as they themselves were.
- e) Bruce Barton explains how this comes about quite well ...

Unfortunately, many of the Pharisees' converts were attracted to status and rule keeping, not to God. By getting caught up in the details of the Pharisees' additional laws and regulations, they completely missed God, to whom the laws pointed. A religion of deeds pressures people to surpass others in what they know and do. Thus, a hypocritical teacher was likely to have students who were even more hypocritical. Making converts was laudable. But when the ones doing the converting are "children of hell," then their converts will likely meet the same end.<sup>48</sup>

**~~~ Side Note: Pharisee Missionary Efforts ~~~**

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<sup>48</sup> Bruce B. Barton, [Matthew](#), Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 453.

There is credible evidence that some Pharisees actively sought converts, and Matthew 23:15 portrays their efforts as exceptionally energetic. However, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the Pharisees maintained a large, organized missionary program comparable to the later Christian missionary movement. The verse may particularly refer to efforts to turn Gentile God-fearers or other Jewish sympathizers into full proselytes.

Jesus' point doesn't require the Pharisees to have had thousands of missionaries scattered around the Mediterranean. His language can mean that they were willing to go to extraordinary lengths to gain even one convert—and then Jesus' criticism concerns what they were making that convert into.

There is also an interesting connection to Paul here. Paul himself had been a Pharisee and was extraordinarily zealous. The fact that he later became Christianity's great missionary to the Gentiles raises the possibility that his missionary method—though radically redirected by Christ—was not entirely foreign to his Pharisaic background.

**Matthew 23:16–22(ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’  
<sup>17</sup> You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? <sup>18</sup> And you say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.’ <sup>19</sup> You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? <sup>20</sup> So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. <sup>21</sup> And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. <sup>22</sup> And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.

- 1) Here, Jesus attacks and tares down the Pharisaical idea of the qualitative levels of swearing.
  - a) As a quick review of this from our discussion back in chapter 6...
  - b) The Jewish people were especially keen on personal oaths, and they added their own special twist to them. They set up a hierarchy; how binding things were vs. the object you swore by.
    - i) The objects of their oaths were:
      - (1) *God's name*
      - (2) *The temple (gold)*
      - (3) *The altar (sacrifice)*
      - (4) *Heaven*
      - (5) *Earth*
      - (6) *Jerusalem*
      - (7) *One's own head*
      - (8) *The Law/Torah*
      - (9) *The lives of your children*
      - (10) *By one's own life*
    - ii) The hierarchy was:

- (1) Most Binding – Direct oaths using God's name.
  - (2) Highly Binding – Oaths made using sacred objects (Temple, altar, sacrifices).
  - (3) Binding (avoided using God's name) – Oaths by natural elements (heaven, earth)
  - (4) Obligatory (less formal) – Personal oaths were more easily broken.
- c) However, as you recall, Jesus said do not swear at all, instead let your yes be yes and your no be no.

**So, going back to this passage, why did Jesus call these Pharisees “blind guides and blind fools?”**

- a) If one sets aside the issue of levels of swearing for a moment, Jesus is really trying to make a different point.
- b) As the leaders they were supposed to be, the Pharisees did not have a “basic understanding” of the very elements of the temple and altar and for that matter God himself!
- c) Though the whole idea of swearing was wrong, the idea here is that the levels they set showed their lack of understanding of what was and was not important.
- d) As with so many things, these guys did not understand the importance of things.
- e) ***This idea is astonishing!*** The fact that these teachers and self-proclaimed religious guides of the nation, could not understand or even worse ignored the basic ideas of God's temple and sacrifices is almost unbelievable.

**Matthew 23:23–24(ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. <sup>24</sup> You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

- 1) Again, Jesus is calling them to task for their neglecting of the intent of God's Law.
  - a) The tithing of these items was not wrong; Jesus is not condemning that.

**Leviticus 27:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> “Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD's; it is holy to the LORD.

- a) The problem was the reason they performed the tithe.
  - b) God's law was then and is now to be a matter of heart – heart for God in obedience and heart for others for love and caring.
  - c) They were doing all the obedience to the detail parts but they had no heart – no real love for God or their fellow man.
  - d) They did what they did to show how righteous they could be. It was all about them – not God!!
- 2) And, oh by the way just to show you how far off base you are, Jesus says, you strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.
- a) Think about the size difference between these two.

- b) Simply put, Jesus is saying again in a more exemplary way they were making sure they have every detail of the outward keeping of the Law correct (the gnat) and yet missed the greatest commandment, love of God and their fellow man (the camel).

3) Jesus has also just told them this in answer to the lawyer's question:

**Matthew 22:37–40(ESV)**

**The Great Commandment**

<sup>37</sup> And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

- a) It is interesting that they knew the words but for whatever the reason, they did not internalize them.
- b) God said from the beginning He always wanted his Law to be written on our hearts.
- c) Without that, all the rule keeping that one can do is worthless.

1) Jesus continues ...

**Matthew 23:25–26(ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup> You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

- 2) Jesus takes one more progressive step toward the real problem in all this – the hearts of the Pharisees.
- 3) Here, He focuses on inner defilement and the scribes' and Pharisees' failure to distinguish between external “correctness” and internal “cleanness.”
  - a) The Pharisees were obsessed about having contact with only “clean” things.
  - b) They not only washed the kitchen utensils but also made certain that the utensils were ceremonially clean.
    - i) Everything was “outside” appearances!
    - ii) The inside was “full of greed and self-indulgence.”
  - c) Jesus' point is that if they clean the inside, then the outside will be clean as well.
    - i) Get the heart in the right place and then all the details will be meaningful – not just to you but especially to God.

**How does what Jesus says here apply to us?**