

## Gospel of Matthew Chapter 23 -- John Karmelich

1. There was a famous bible teacher, a generation back named Walter Martin.
  - a) One of Walter's more famous lines concerning telling people about Jesus is as follows:
  - b) "If they won't listen to Jesus, give them Moses!"
  - c) What he meant by that is if people aren't willing to hear the good news of the Gospel, then tell them the bad news about eternal damnation.
  - d) "Give them Moses" is to tell people about the law, God's requirements for perfection and how people can't those requirements based on their efforts.
2. Which leads us to Chapter 23 of the Gospel of Matthew.
  - a) This is Jesus' final public speech.
  - b) It is a great speech to be read in contrast to the Sermon on the Mount.
    - i) The Sermon on the Mount was one speech given by Jesus in Chapters 5-7.
    - ii) It was the first public sermon recorded by Jesus in this Gospel.
  - c) I've nicknamed this speech the "anti-Sermon on the Mount"
    - i) The Sermon on the Mount is all about changing your life on the inside, and that in turn, will change your behavior on the outside.
    - ii) This speech in Chapter 23 is all about what happens to you when you fail to change your behavior on the inside.
      - a) It is mostly about trying to do "good things" on the outside when you fail to deal with your internal attitudes.
      - b) It is a lot like trying to kill a weed. If you just mow -over the surface area, the weed will grow back. You have to kill the root. That is the idea behind the Sermon on the Mount. It is about "killing the evil roots" inside of you.
      - c) Jesus focuses this speech on those "mow ing over the weeds" as opposed to dealing with our internal nature.
3. Chapter 23 is a speech given by Jesus.
  - a) It is addressed to both those who follow Jesus and those who don't.
  - b) Remember that Jesus is a matter of days away from the cross and He knew it.
  - c) He was aware that many in this crowd wanted Jesus dead.
  - d) He uses this opportunity to warn those who don't get the fact that Jesus is the Messiah of the condemnation to come.
  - e) That's why I compare this speech to the line: "Give them Moses". "Moses" in this context refers to the law (i.e., the Old Testament commandments). It is about judgment.
  - f) It is a direct warning, even a pleading of those who don't want to accept Jesus to change.
4. The most common word used in this chapter is the word "woe".
  - a) Seven or eight times, depending upon your bible, Jesus says, "Woe to you Pharisees".
  - b) "Woe" in the original Greek language, has both a condemnation and sorrowful tone.
  - c) You should not read this speech as an angry-Jesus being mad at those who condemn him.
  - d) Instead, you have to see the tone as a combination of "righteous anger" and pity.
    - i) It is "righteous anger" in that Jesus is a like a judge who pronounces a guilty verdict on those who deserve a guilty verdict.
    - ii) At the same time, Jesus understands the eternity of hell. Therefore, it is also given as a sorrowful warning of what they have done.
5. This speech is primarily for the Jewish reader, but there are also things for us to learn as well.
  - a) Remember Matthew's fundamental purpose was to convince a Jewish reader that Jesus is their promised Messiah.
  - b) This whole speech is only given in Matthew's Gospel. It is "very Jewish" in nature in that it focuses on how Judaism operated at that time and its faults.
  - c) Yet, even within it, there are a few tidbits that we non-Jewish Christians can learn from.

- d) While the religious sect of the Pharisees does not exist today, the attitude of the Pharisees is a common problem throughout human history.
    - i) What we can draw from this speech is a “checklist” for us to watch out for in our behavior as to what Jesus expects us as a Christian.
  - e) This speech is not just, “You Pharisees fail to recognize me Jesus as the Messiah and now you are in big trouble”.
    - i) If it were that simple, the speech would only be one sentence and not a whole chapter. Jesus does give details as to why they are guilty before God.
    - ii) The fact the speech goes on for a whole chapter indicates there are details and life lessons designed for believers as well as non-believers.
6. Verse 1: Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:
- a) Notice who Jesus is speaking to in this chapter: “The crowds and his disciples”.
    - i) Jesus is in “earshot” of the Pharisees, but as I said in the introduction, the speech is not just given as a warning to non-believers, but has lessons for the believers.
  - b) Remember in Chapter 22, Jesus played “question and answer” with the audience.
    - i) Jesus silenced his critics with his answers.
    - ii) That same audience is still right here. They are simply standing there grumbling that Jesus answered their questions in a way that they could not respond to.
    - iii) Jesus is still in command and still talking.
    - iv) Now in Verse 1, Jesus uses this opportunity to make one last public speech.
7. Verse 2: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.
- a) The term “Moses-seat” refers to the religious leaders in Jerusalem.
    - i) The term specifically refers to the head rabbi’s who’s job it was to properly interpret the Old Testament to the crowd.
    - ii) Remember that people didn’t own bibles. They learned their Hebrew Scriptures by attending synagogues and listening to the rabbi’s preach.
    - iii) These guys were given the responsibility of properly interpreting the law, and thus the title “Moses-seat”.
  - b) Remember that the “teachers of the law” and the Pharisees are distinct groups.
    - i) The “teachers” are those who went to the equivalent of “Hebrew seminary”.
      - a) They spent their life studying their bible and the commentaries.
      - b) By this time, the Jews had thousands of pages of official commentary on their bible, collectively called the Talmud and the Mishna. It was written over the centuries on how to interpret the Old Testament.
    - ii) The Pharisees were a religious sect within Judaism.
      - a) They were not necessarily rabbi’s.
      - b) Pharisee Judaism is a “way of life”. It was to take the Old Testament, and estimate the strictest interpretation even at the point of being ridiculous.
        - (1) For example, there was one subgroup that was worried that looking at any women other than their wife could lead to temptation. They would walk around with their heads down to avoid temptation. They were called the “bloody Pharisees” because they had all sorts of bumps and bruises from walking around with their heads down.
    - c) Even the Talmud itself has some condemnation against some of the Pharisees sub-groups for being external-only in their practice and not living up to their own rules.
    - d) Modern Orthodox Judaism is based on the teachings of the Pharisees.
    - e) So why would somebody want to be a Pharisee?
      - (1) It appeals to the ego. “I am more holy than you and I am going to have great heavenly rewards based because I live my life in strict observance of the law”.

- (2) To “be a better person” through self-discipline has appeal. We all want to be pleasing to God. Their heart was in the right place, but the mistake was trying to please God through their efforts.

8. Verse 3: So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.
- a) The first sentence gets me: “So you must obey them and do everything they tell you”
    - i) What did Jesus mean by that? Are we to obey all aspects of the law?
    - ii) First of all, Jesus is talking about the Old Testament itself and the reading of such.
  - b) Remember that the Old Testament is still binding upon us.
    - i) The difference is Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the law so we don’t have to. Out of gratitude for what Jesus did, we then let God work through us to “obey the law”. God wants to rule *through* you to change you from the inside out.
    - ii) The sacrificial aspects of the law are all taken care of in Jesus. The practical aspects of the law are things God expects of us and are things we can do if and only if we let God rule in our hearts so He can work through us.
  - c) Let’s get back to that idea of “you must obey them”.
    - i) Jesus is saying in effect, “Look, just because the preacher is a hypocrite and doesn’t practice what he preaches does not mean the bible is a bad book. The speaker may be bad, but truth is truth no matter who says it.”
    - ii) The other concept being taught is “whoever is in authority must be obeyed.”
      - a) It does not mean to obey them to a point of denying Jesus.
      - b) This is not about violating biblical principals.
      - c) It is about respecting those of authority, whether we like it or not.
      - d) Here is another verse I discussed in the last lesson: “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.” (Rom. 13:1, NIV)
      - e) It is the idea that leaders are God-appointed, and we must be good-witnesses to them while they are in power.
        - (1) If our leaders are corrupt or wicked, it is also ok, to vote them out or pray for God to raise up good leaders.

9. Verse 4: They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

    - a) For a large part of this chapter, we are going to read how the religious leaders were hypocrites. The word “hypocrites” is where we get our word “actor”. It is one who is acting differently in one setting than he or she is in real life.
    - b) In summary, Jesus is saying they don’t practice what they preach.

10. Verse 5: "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; <sup>6</sup> they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; <sup>7</sup> they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’

    - a) The first sentence of Verse 5 summarizes much of the chapter:
      - i) “Everything they do is done for men to see”.
      - ii) Compare that statement with one Jesus said from the Sermon on the Mount: “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. (Matthew 6:5, NIV)
      - iii) The point is that this is not a condemnation of religious acts, it is a condemnation of motivation. It is a good idea every know and then, especially in church to check yourself and ask, “why am I doing this? Is it to be seen by people, or am I doing this because I am grateful for what Jesus did for me?”

- iv) Remember the whole point of the Sermon on the Mount is about keeping God on the throne of your heart. Chapter 6 of that speech is mostly about our religious acts. It is as if our ego's are saying, "Well, if I can't be in charge in Chapter 5, let me at least be in charge of the religious stuff in Chapter 6. If I (our ego) can't rule in our relationship with God and others, let me still rule in religious efforts."
- v) It comes back to "killing the weed-roots" growing inside of us.
- b) Let's take on the specific examples in the rest of these verses.
  - i) Phylacteries are leather boxes containing 4 scriptures.
    - a) Three times in the Scriptures (Exodus 13:18, Deuteronomy 6:8, 11:18) God says about his law that you shall keep them "as frontlets between your eyes" (NKJV). The idea is to keep your eyes focused upon God.
    - b) Well, the Pharisees took this literal. They wore leather boxes containing a handful of scriptures dangling from their foreheads.
  - ii) Notice Jesus' condemnation is not against having phylacteries.
    - a) Having symbolic things to keep our focus on God is not a problem in itself.
    - b) Jesus condemns "making them wide" in Verse 6.
    - c) Jesus point is they made these boxes big so others can see them.
  - iii) The tassels are a similar concept.
    - a) In Numbers 15:38, God commands the Israelites to make blue tassels to hang from their garments. The "blue" is a word-picture for a blue sky. It is a reminder to keep our lives heavenly-focused.
    - b) The condemnation was about making their tassels long.
    - c) Again, it is about doing "religious stuff" to be seen by men.
- c) The last two examples are also about ego.
  - i) Jesus condemns the fact they desire "the best seats in the house" and the fact they loved the people to call them "Rabbi". It is an exalted term meaning teacher.
    - a) The modern example might be the church with the "big fancy" seats for the church leaders. This is un-biblical. The word "minister" means servant. A minister is never to be superior to the congregation in status.

11. Verse 8: "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers.<sup>9</sup> And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.

- <sup>10</sup> Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ.
- a) There is a classical debate within Christianity on how literal to take these verses.
    - i) Are we never to call anyone "Teacher" (which is Rabbi in Hebrew) or Father?
    - ii) Some churches argue that way. There is a denomination called "The Brethren" where everyone in the church is greeted as "Brother or Sister" with no exceptions.
    - iii) The not-so-literal argument is that Jesus is teaching on stature and not titles.
    - iv) This argument is that Jesus is arguing against "not letting a title go to your head".
    - v) Many Protestant groups resent calling Catholic priests "Father" for this reason.
  - b) I don't think Jesus is being so literal as we should not call our paternal fathers "Father".
    - i) I do take the view it is about letting a ministerial title go to your head.
    - ii) If this is a problem for you, just refer to your pastor as "Mr.:"
    - iii) Many protestant groups use titles like "brother Bob" or "Minister Tom" in order to avoid the words "Father" or "Teacher". We have to be careful and people tend to put professional ministers on pedestals no matter what the title.
  - c) Bible ministers and teachers are simply ones who are given the spiritual gift to teach God's word. They are no more, nor any less important than any other Christian. They should be treated as such. They have no special stature with God nor are their prayers "more special" than the laymen of the church.
    - i) They are given more responsibility and with that comes more accountability.

- d) Next, notice Jesus' statement, "You have one Teacher, the Christ."
    - i) Notice Jesus doesn't add "and that's me". Jesus wants us to come to that conclusion on our own without him having to say so.
    - ii) Jesus is not only our Lord and Savior, but also our teacher. We look to his words for instruction on how to live our lives.
12. Verse 11: "The greatest among you will be your servant. <sup>12</sup> For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.
- a) Jesus said we should take our church organizational chart and turn it upside down.
    - i) The top guys are the servants of all.
    - ii) The "bottomrung" is who we serve.
  - b) It does not mean that in our hour-of-need we shouldn't turn to others for help. There is the balance between carrying your weight and turning to others in times of crisis.
  - c) Heavenly rewards require humble attitudes. As I stated earlier, the word "minister" literally means servant.
    - i) Personally I don't like the term "professional minister". I think we are all in the full-time ministry in whatever we do in life.
    - ii) Humility is to put others needs above your own. That is what biblical "love" is all about. Jesus is teaching this in contrast to those who do religious acts for the purpose of building their own ego.
13. Verse 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.
- a) Here comes the woe's. ☺ From Verse 13-32 are eight "woe's" (Possibly seven, as discussed in Verse 14).
  - b) In these verses Jesus is specifically condemning the law-teachers and the Pharisees for their actions. As I stated, it is a combination of a judge pronouncing sentence and sorrow.
  - c) So what did Jesus mean by "shutting the kingdom in men's faces?"
    - i) These leaders not only denied Jesus, but did so publicly.
    - ii) We know of at least one account where a believer was ex-communicated from the synagogue because he choose to follow Jesus. (See John 9:34).
      - a) Don't take that lightly. Imagine being kicked out of your church for being a "bad person". That is the price to be paid for following Jesus.
    - iii) Jesus point in this verse is that not only were these specific teachers and Pharisees not going to heaven, but they were working to prevent others to do the same.
14. Verse 14: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Therefore you will be punished more severely.
- a) This verse is controversial in that many of the early manuscripts does not have it.
  - b) Some bibles have Verse 14 in the text, others just in the footnotes.
  - c) The point is we don't know whether or not this verse is in the original text.
    - i) I happen to believe it is part of the original, but it is just my opinion.
    - ii) This text is too historical, too "unique" to be added, say by a writer centuries later.
  - d) Let me explain "devouring widow's houses"
    - i) Imagine a religious leader walking up to the house of a widow: "Oh ma'am, we are so sorry about the loss of your husband. He was a good man. He is in heaven right now. But you know, we are concerned about you. This can be a great opportunity to show how much you love God. Sign over your house to the church and you will have great eternal blessings. Show God, now in this moment of your pain, how much you trust him and are willing to give your house to his glory."
    - ii) In all of this "religious talk", they took over a widow's home.
    - iii) It sounds preposterous, but you would be surprised how many "religious people" prey upon elderly widows. They go after the guilt for financial rewards.

- e) The last part of this verse is about “lengthy prayers”.
    - i) This goes back to my quote earlier of Matthew 6:5 when Jesus said, “ they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men”
15. Verse 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.
- a) In our day and age, we don't see a lot of Jewish Evangelism.
    - i) Jews don't spend a lot of time trying to convert outsiders to Judaism.
    - ii) Some of that existed in Jesus' day, a practice going back a few centuries earlier.
  - b) A person who is a recent convert to anything usually has a lot of zeal.
    - i) The point is that these non-believers in Jesus go through incredible lengths and trouble in order to win over a convert, and that person also denies Jesus.
    - ii) I believe the term “twice as much the son of hell” is because this new convert now is zealous in their anti-Jesus attitudes.
    - iii) We read some of this in the Book of Acts. The Jews who don't believe Paul as he travels around work hard at teaching others that Jesus is not the Messiah. These others then become zealous to work against Paul and his efforts.
16. Verse 16: "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.
- a) I can summarize this paragraph with this comment: “There are no loopholes with God”.
    - i) Religious Jews of that day had a whole elaborate system of taking oaths.
    - ii) It is based on part of the 10 commandments that says in effect, “you shall not take God's name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).
    - iii) Their commentaries on how to take oaths had all sorts of do's and don'ts.
      - a) For example, their commentary says that, “Swearing by heaven and earth was not binding, nor was swearing by Jerusalem, though swearing toward Jerusalem was.” Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia on Matthew 5:33)
    - iv) Jesus is getting back to the idea of “religious loopholes”. The religious Jews of that day thought that making oaths in one way was not binding, but in other ways were binding.
  - b) In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also commented on the topic of taking oaths. Jesus summarized that section by saying in effect, “if you want to give your word on a commitment, just say “yes” or “no” and don't add anything to that (Ref. Matthew 5:37).
  - c) Jesus point in the Sermon on the Mount was a little different than his point here.
    - i) When Jesus talked about not taking oaths in the Sermon on the Mount (Chapter 5) his main point was to “keep your ego away from your commitments.”
      - a) For example, if I say “I swear on a stack of bibles this is true, does not mean you can't trust me when I don't say, “I swear on a stack of bibles”?
      - b) That is why Jesus says in effect, “Just say “yes or no” and no more”.
    - ii) His main point in this text is comparing material things to spiritual things.
      - a) The binding oaths in this paragraph were the “gold” and the “gifts”.
    - iii) The religious Jews of that day believed that making an oath by the altar (i.e., “I swear by the altar of God”) is not as binding as gold-as the-building-material or a monetary gift given to God. They viewed the material thing as more tangible, and therefore, more binding.

- a) Jesus response is “What is more important from God’s perspective, the temple itself or the monetary items?”
    - iv) The “woe” of this paragraph is simply the fact that these religious leaders were putting more emphasis on material things than spiritual things.
  - d) The last thing to point out from this paragraph is oaths are binding.
    - i) Jesus wants us to be a good witness for him.
    - ii) He wants us to have a reputation as a trustworthy person.
    - iii) If people can’t trust what we say, how can they trust what we say about God?
    - iv) Therefore, if you are looking to get out of a commitment “because this type of oath is not legally binding”, you are no longer trustworthy.
    - v) If you are more interested in “legal loopholes” than having a reputation as a truth-teller, than you cannot be a good witness for Jesus.
17. Verse 23: “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.
- a) First notice the phrase (in the second line) where Jesus says, “you have neglected the more important matters of the law.”
    - i) Jesus is saying that some aspects of the Old Testament law have more importance than others. They don’t all have equal-weight in God’s eye.
  - b) Let’s talk about what they did right, before talking about what they did wrong.
    - i) First of all, they practiced “tithing”, which is giving 10% of what they had to God.
    - ii) They were so picky about this, they went to their spice gardens, picked out the leaves and counted “one for God and nine for me. one for God and nine for me.”
    - iii) Notice Jesus says near the end of Verse 23 “without neglecting the former.”
      - a) Jesus understands that we should give a tenth of what we earn to God.
  - c) Now comes the bad news: Jesus is saying they were hypocritical in that they obeyed some parts of the law (“tithing”) but ignored the more important parts of the law.
    - i) Jesus might be paraphrasing Micah 6:8. It is very similar to what Jesus says:
    - ii) “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8, NIV)
    - iii) Let me paraphrase Jesus here, “Yes, yes I know you give 10% of your spice garden. It’s a nice gesture, but I’m not very impressed. I would be more impressed if you focused on the ideas of practicing justice, mercy and being faithful to God.”
  - d) How where these Pharisees not practicing justice, mercy and faithfulness?
    - i) For example, when Jesus said, “they were devouring widow’s homes for the sake of money”, that could be an example of not practicing justice or having mercy.
      - a) Many of the examples of this chapter show how they didn’t practice what they preached and didn’t get the big-picture concepts of “the law”.
    - ii) One can also read this concept in regards to not seeing Jesus as the Messiah:
      - a) “Justice is similar to the Christian concept of “justified”. It sort of means “just-as-if-I-never sinned”. We are sinless before God because of our trust in Jesus. To think you are “just” before God based on your religious deeds is the failing of the “Pharisees” in all of us.
      - b) Think of “mercy” as asking God for mercy in our lives as opposed to trying to justify ourselves before God based on our good deeds.
      - c) “Faithfulness” is the trust that the Messiah is coming. They failed to see the purpose of Jesus first coming.

18. Verse 24: You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.
- a) In Leviticus Chapter 11, there is a whole list of animals that are forbidden to be eaten.
    - i) The reason the animals are forbidden are a whole lecture unto themselves. I believe they are word-pictures designed to keep our focus upon God. It would take a whole lesson unto itself to give the details.
    - ii) These forbidden animals are not binding upon Christians.
      - a) In Acts Chapter 15, it was decided which Jewish customs were to be binding upon Gentile Christians. In summary, we can eat what we want.
    - iii) The largest of these forbidden animals was the camel. The smallest was the gnat.
    - iv) Religious Jesus would for example, pick a gnat out of their soup.
    - v) For Jesus to say “you strain out a gnat but swallow a camel” is to say in effect “you pay attention to the smallest details of the law, but miss the big-items of the law”.
  - b) To use a modern cliché, Jesus is saying, “You miss the forest from the trees”.
    - i) They are so busy staring at individual trees they didn’t realize they are in a forest.
    - ii) On another occasion, Jesus said to this same group:
      - a) “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” (John 5:39-40, NIV)
    - iii) Jesus point is “the forest of the Old Testament” is Jesus himself.
    - iv) They were so busy studying the details that they missed the fact that throughout the Old Testament speaks of every aspect of Jesus life, purpose and ministry.
19. Verse 25: "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. <sup>26</sup> Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.
- a) Remember the general-theme of the Sermon on the Mount was about keeping God on the throne of our heart.
    - i) Christianity is all about God changing us from the inside out.
    - ii) God wants to rule in our hearts, in our lives and change us internally as well as externally.
    - iii) For God to make us better people, first he has to clean out the inside.
  - b) The mistake of Judaism is that it focuses on external behavior.
    - i) The principals of living the requirements of the Old Testament are excellent.
    - ii) You can live a happy, fulfilled life if you can keep the Old Testament requirements based on self-discipline. The problem is it is impossible.
    - iii) Remember Peter’s words in Acts 15: “Now then, why do you (religious Jews) try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.” (Acts 15:10-11, NIV)
      - a) Peter was talking about trying to be in good standing before God by “being a good person” (i.e., “keeping the law”).
      - b) Before you move on and say, “I know all of this”, stop and think how often we don’t please God by trying to use self-discipline or “our own wits” to get through a situation without turning that situation over to God.
    - iv) Which surprisingly, leads us back to this paragraph. ☺
      - a) Jesus uses the illustration of a cup that is pretty on the outside and dirty on the inside. It is a focus on our “religious acts”.
        - (1) Others, they may see us as being religious and “good people”.



- v) The problem is God can read our thoughts, the good as well as the bad.
    - a) Have you ever thought evil of someone? Have you ever thought of wanting someone dead in a moment of rage? God knows those thoughts as well as the good ones. That is how God can think of us as “evil” despite our religious acts.
    - b) Getting back to the Sermon on the Mount (I’m doing that a lot in this lesson, aren’t I? ☺), Jesus said of us: “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matt. 7:11, NIV)
  - c) Notice Jesus “solution” to the Pharisees was to “first clean out the inside of the cup and then the outside will be clean also”.
    - i) First of all, you know Jesus is not being literal. If a cup is dirty on both sides, cleaning the inside won’t affect the outside.
    - ii) Jesus is talking about our internal behavior and our internal thoughts. It goes back to pulling the roots of our internal weeds. If we can give our internal thoughts and desires over to God, the outside will become clean.
      - a) “We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 10:5b, NIV).
20. Verse 27: "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.
- a) The same concept of “clean outside/dirty inside” continues with this next “woe”.
  - b) In the Old Testament it is forbidden to touch a dead person.
    - i) There is a whole set of rituals about who can touch a dead person and how that person becomes “ceremonial unclean” for a time being. (Translation: If you touch a dead body, you can’t go to church for a short period of time”.)
    - ii) The principal behind that concept is that God takes life seriously and God wants us to respect life. When we deal with death, we are not spiritually clean.
  - c) Given the “no-touchy-a-dead-person” rule, the Jews would clean and whitewash gravesites as to avoid accidentally touching that grave. Before big Jewish holidays, when many people would come to town, they would whitewash graves to make them obvious so people can avoid them.
    - i) Jesus is saying these Pharisees are like those graves: pretty on the outside, full of rotting corpses on the inside.
    - ii) Again, compare this illustration to our human nature. When we do charitable things, we may look “pretty” on the outside, but God knows our internal nature.
21. Verse 29: "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.’
- a) In the same way we may lay flowers at the graves of our family members, these religious leaders built gravesites and put flowers at markers for the Old Testament prophets. (Some may have been the actual graves, others may have been monuments.)
  - b) If you read through the Bible, and study some history behind the events, you will learn that most, if not all of the Old Testament prophets died violent deaths. The Jewish people if their days rejected their message as well.
    - i) The Pharisees were saying in effect, “If we were around in those days, we would not have rejected their message. We are better than the heathen Jews of that day.”
    - ii) Notice Jesus response to that act in the next few verses.

22. Verse 31: “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!
- a) Remember Jesus knew he was only days away from the cross.
    - i) Three times in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus predicted his death and resurrection.
    - ii) He knew this group wanted him dead.
    - iii) Therefore, you have to read these set of verses as a prediction.
    - iv) Jesus is saying in effect, “You are no better than the people who murdered the Old Testament Prophets because you want to/about to murder me.
23. Verse 33: “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?
- a) Well, this doesn’t sound good does it? ☺
  - b) Remember the word “woe” is a combination of a judge-sentence and a warning.
  - c) A “brood of vipers” is a bunch of snakes. Snakes are a word-picture for sin based on the devil’s punishment from the Adam and Eve “fruit incident”.
24. Verse 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.
- a) Notice Jesus says, “I am sending you prophets, wise men and teachers”.
    - i) This is future tense. Who is Jesus referring to?
    - ii) It is referring to Christians themselves. Each of us as Christians are given special gifts to be used by God. Some as prophets (a special ability to either predict the future and/or to expound upon God’s word), some as wise men (the gift of knowledge) and some as teachers. There are other spiritual gifts as well.
    - iii) In the Book of Acts, we read of Paul and others preaching in synagogues.
      - a) The religious Jews kill some, flog others and pursue from town to town.
      - b) In fact, that describes Paul’s adventures at different stages of his life. He suffered from all three of these.
      - c) In a way, Verse 34 validates Paul’s missionary journeys, even though Paul was not one of the 12 disciples, nor one of Jesus’ followers at this time.
  - b) Jesus is saying in effect to the Pharisee’s, “Look, just to prove you are in big eternal trouble for rejecting me, I’m going to prove in the future you are no better than the guys who killed the Old Testament prophets. There will be future prophets, and you will kill and persecute those people. Therefore, you are no better than them.”
  - c) Also notice in Verse 34, it is Jesus who sends “prophets, wise men and teachers”.
    - i) It is Jesus who gives us these gifts, and expects us to use them for God’s glory.
25. Verse 35: “And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.
- a) In the English language, it sounds like Jesus is saying “You have killed the prophets from “A to Z” as in (A)bel to (Z)echariah.” That is just a coincidence.
  - b) What is true is that Jesus is listing these two people chronologically.
    - i) Abel is the first recorded human murder in the bible.
      - a) His brother was jealous because he gave a better sacrifice than Abel and murdered him (See Genesis Chapter 4).
    - ii) Zechariah is one of the last prophets listed in the bible. He may have been the last one to be murdered. His death is not recorded in the bible itself, it is only mentioned here by Jesus.
    - iii) Jesus is covering the history of Jewish-murders of righteous people because others refused to accept their message. They would rather have that person dead than hear what they have to say.

- c) This verse is full of controversy among bible scholars.
  - i) There are a number of Zechariah's in the bible.
  - ii) The Zechariah of the Book of Zechariah was not recorded as "son of Berekiah"
  - iii) Bible scholars give a number of possible explanations:
    - a) Jesus may have been referring to another Zechariah. There was a Zechariah who was the son of Berekiah listed near the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles. In a Jewish bible, Chronicles was the last book and Genesis was the first book. Jesus could be saying in effect, "The guy murdered near the start of the bible and the guy murdered near the end of the bible".
    - b) There are other possibilities given as well. Without getting into a lot of details, this controversy does not negate the Word of God because there are possible explanations.
    - c) I believe the bible in its "original autographs" are the Word of God. There is the possibility of a few copyist errors, but these controversial verses are few in number and have little, if any, affect upon any of the major Christian foundational principles.

26. Verse 36: "I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.
- a) Jesus is now getting "corporate". From here, to the end of the chapter, Jesus is focusing on the Israel nation, and not just the Pharisees that Jesus was specifically addressing.
  - b) Jesus is saying that because the Jews of that time failed to recognize Jesus as their Messiah, they were going to be punished "corporately" as well as individually.
    - i) Individually, those who rejected suffered eternal damnation.
    - ii) Corporately, within 40 years, Israel no longer existed as a country. The Roman Empire got tired of Israel rebelling against Rome. They destroyed Israel, destroyed the temple, and killed millions of Jews. Jews were then scattered all over the world. Israel was not a country again until 1948.
  - c) It is important to note the word "this" in Verse 36. It is only about this generation.
    - i) Jesus does not say the "woe's" will come upon every Jewish generation from hereon in.
    - ii) You cannot use this verse as an excuse to punish future generation of Jews. That has been a great tragedy and mistake of Christian history.
    - iii) This generation was given the privilege of seeing Jesus. Because they rejected that information, they were punished corporately.
      - a) Jesus said, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48a, NKJV).
27. Verse 37: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.
- a) Personally, I can almost hear Jesus crying at this point.
    - i) Think of a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wing for protection.
  - b) Reading through the entire Old Testament, you can see how often God desired a generation of people who whole-heartedly turned and worshipped Him.
    - i) Occasionally people would repent, usually because they were facing some hardship and were desperate for God again. As soon as things were peaceful, they would turn away from God again. That pattern is repeated over and over again in the bible.
    - ii) Think how similar it is in our lives. When a crisis is in front of us, we turn to God. When things are going well, think how easily we turn away from God.

- c) One of the great tragedies of all human history is this phrase “you were not willing”.
    - i) God the Father did not force the Jews of that day to accept Jesus.
    - ii) He gave them ample evidence through the Old Testament prophecies, through Jesus miracles, through his teachings to come to the conclusion that Jesus was sent to die for their sins. Because people were not willing to accept this, most of that generation not only suffered a violent death, but also are in hell for eternity.
    - iii) The good news is there is hope for the future Israel, as we will read in Verse 29.
28. Verse 28: “Look, your house is left to you desolate.
- a) For 2,000 years, there was no Israel. Jesus prediction came true.
  - b) The “house” refers to the nation of Israel existing.
  - c) Or it could refer to the Temple itself. It was destroyed in 70AD and has not been rebuilt. Today, the Islamic “dome of the Rock” stands where the temple was. I take the view that a new Temple will be built either on or near that site prior to Jesus Second Coming.
  - d) The purpose of Israel coming together again today is in preparation of Jesus Second coming. The Jews don’t accept that, but if you study Revelation, many of the events of Jesus second coming require Israel to be back in the land again.
29. Verse 29: “For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”
- a) The great word in Verse 29 is “until”. Jesus says you won’t see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”
  - b) This verse can be interpreted one of two ways:
    - i) First, it can refer to any individual Jew who accepts Jesus today.
    - ii) That person will then see Jesus again once they accept Jesus as their Lord.
    - iii) The other view is that it refers to the nation of Israel corporately saying Jesus is the Lord. Given the fact that Jesus is talking to Jews as a nation, as opposed to Jews individually, I believe this is the correct view.
  - c) Based on this verse, I do believe that one of the pre-requisites for Jesus second coming is the nation of Israel “corporately” praying for Jesus return.
    - i) During the 7-year tribulation, when the Antichrist is wrecking havoc on Israel, there will be two prominent prophets (See Revelation 11) speaking about Jesus. I believe many Jews of that day will pray for Jesus return. That event is what I believe Jesus is talking about when he says the word “until” in Verse 29.
  - d) There is a “hint” of this event in by the Prophet Hosea: “Then I (Jesus?) will go back to my place (heaven?) until they (Jewish nation?) admit their guilt. And they (Jewish nation?) will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me.” (Hosea 5:15, NIV)
    - i) I added the phrases in the parenthesis as to consider the possibility that this prediction by Hosea is speaking of this future event.
30. OK, It is time to wrap this up.
- a) This is Jesus final public speech. He is days away from the cross and about three years into his public ministry.
    - i) There is no pleading of, “Won’t you please believe I’m the Messiah?”
    - ii) There is no asking, “You’ve seen all the miracles, why won’t you believe me?”
    - iii) There are no bible studies to go over the Old Testament prophecies.
  - b) God gives most of us lots of chances and lots of opportunities to accept Jesus.
    - i) To those who don’t, it ends with “woe’s”. There is a judgment day coming.
    - ii) Like I said in the beginning, if they won’t listen to Jesus, give them Moses.
    - iii) The law does condemn, but Jesus is the remedy.
  - c) To the saved Christian, these “woe’s remind us:
    - i) To see non-believers not as bad people, but as those who need Jesus.
    - ii) It is also a reminder to ourselves, in those moments of our lives when we get our focus off of God and unto our own problems, is when the “woe’s” can hit us.

31. Heavenly Father, We are grateful that you have chosen us out of the world to spend eternity with you. We are grateful that we are not cast into outer darkness although we deserve it. Help us to keep the eternal perspective as we live our lives as witnesses for you. Help us to see others not as inferior, not as bad people, but as those you love and those you want to repent. Guide us now, in Jesus name, amen.