

Encountering Jesus: The Religious

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Text: Matthew 23

NOTES

A. Introduction:

1. Judaism was at the heart of Jewish society. The religious were attempting to follow the law in a world full of Roman gods.
2. Groups of the religious were the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes.
3. For years Jesus had a running feud with them which climaxed in Jerusalem, during Passover week, when Jesus delivered a message to his disciples and the crowds concerning these religious leaders, recorded in Matthew 23.
4. We take notice. Jesus, normally kind and gentle, delivered a passionate indictment of these leaders who had lost their spiritual compass.
5. "Woe" is a strong word of sorrow, correction and condemnation. **Pastor Derrick:** *"You and I know that we are yielding to a religious spirit when any part of these seven woes show up in our soul."*

B. Jesus' seven woes on the religious—then and now. You know you're a Pharisee when you...

1. **Shut people out – Matthew 23:13.**
 - a. This was an indictment against hypocrisy, saying one thing but doing another. Their words and actions became a stumbling block, hindering people from entering God's kingdom.
 - b. What do visitors to our church (for example) see when they observe us?
2. **Do evil things – Matthew 23:15.**
 - a. The religious traveled as evangelists. Jesus did not condemn evangelistic efforts but their mentoring of converts to do evil.
 - b. In our time, children were physically and sexually abused (e.g. aboriginal residential schools) in the name of religion. **Pastor Derrick:** *"If you have been abused by religion, by the church, hurt or manipulated or coerced by religion, I'm so sorry."*
3. **Twist the truth – Matthew 23:16.**
 - a. We would call this "religious spin"—evasion, cutting corners.
 - b. **Pastor Derrick:** *"Followers of Jesus are people of truth. The religious hate to be wrong. They have too much pride and want to blame someone else."*
4. **Lose sight of the heart of God – Matthew 23:23.**
 - a. Pharisees paid attention to the fine details of the law but had lost sight of God's heart, which is justice, mercy, and faith.
 - b. We concern ourselves with unimportant details (e.g. stains on the carpet, wrinkled tablecloths) when we should be focusing on the thousands going to a Christless eternity.
5. **Live as if life is all about external appearances – Matthew 23:25.**
 - a. The Pharisees were clean outside but inside full of greed & indulgence.
 - b. We too need to be more concerned with the state of our soul, our speech, thoughts, purity of lifestyle than how we look to others. Transformation Weekends help us deal with inner issues.
6. **Disguise decay in your soul – Matthew 23:27.**
 - a. Jesus called the Pharisees "whitewashed tombs...beautiful but on the inside full of dead men's bones and uncleanness.
 - b. During the Transformation Weekend, a questionnaire helps bring sins, habits, bondages to light, the answers are burned to symbolize we're done with them, then there is prayer for filling of the Holy Spirit.
7. **Reject truth and murder the Truth-teller – Matthew 23:29.**
 - a. The religious establishment not only rejected Jesus but turned on Him.
 - b. We also often turn on the messenger, e.g. when pastors deliver convicting sermons.

DISCUSSION:

1. How were the Pharisees guilty of hypocrisy? When have we been guilty of hypocrisy?
2. In our time, what evil things have people suffered in the name of religion? In our culture where extra-marital relationships are commonplace and sexual preference and gender identity deviations are celebrated, how can we maintain biblical standards of morality within the body without being accused of abuse and manipulation?
3. What is "religious spin"? How were the Pharisees guilty of it? When might we be guilty of it?
4. What is the heart of God? What are some ways we can make God's priorities ours in the setting of CLA, our homes, our work or study places?
5. How do we become aware of the state of our own soul? Share with each other how you maintain your relationship with God, read the Bible, pray etc. Have you participated in a Transformation Weekend? Share your experiences.
6. Which of these woes do you relate to the most? Are there weeds in your life? What do you need to do to uproot them?

PRAYER:

Dear Father, please reveal to us our hypocrisies, the lies that need to be exposed, the facades of a religious spirit and legalism that need to be torn down. Uproot that which ought not to be in our lives and set us free. Please fill us with Your Holy Spirit so when we gather together and then disperse to walk in the world, we will live by Your priorities of justice, mercy, and faith. Amen.