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THE GOSPEL OF JESUS

MAKING A WAY OR STANDING IN THE WAY MATTHEW 23:1-12

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. We have been studying Jesus' last trip to Jerusalem during the Feast of Passover
 - 1. Dangerous place for Him to be, the home of the Jewish leaders that want Him dead
 - 2. Even though Jesus was surrounded by His enemies, that did not prevent Him from bearing witness to the truth about His identity and the true identity of these false teachers
- B. Throughout His ministry on earth, Jesus exposed the religious leaders for being false teachers
 - 1. He has called them a generation of vipers, the children of satan, He compared them to leaven, puffed up but with no real substance, described them as cups that were clean on the outside but filthy on the inside
 - 2. The parables that He taught claimed that sinners – prostitutes and tax collectors were welcome in the Kingdom of God but these Jewish leaders had no place at the table
 - a) And that infuriated them
 - b) ***Matt 21:45 Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. 46 But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.***
 - 3. They were restrained because of public opinion about Jesus
 - a) What do you do when you want to kill the messenger, but the tide of public opinion won't allow you to? You attempt to turn the tide of public opinion
- C. In our last few studies that is exactly what the Pharisees and Sadducees have attempted to do
 - 1. Test Jesus, trap Jesus. Matt 22 - the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk – they tested him with taxes and the afterlife – but with each interaction Jesus left His accusers exposed
 - 2. So much so that in verse 45 of Matt 22 we read that “no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.”
- D. Nothing that Jesus has said about the Pharisees compares to what we see in Matthew 23
 - 1. These are Jesus's harshest words in all of the scripture. It is His closing arguments. His final indictment against these false teachers.

2. This isn't just an indictment of the Jewish leaders of His time - this is an indictment against the false religion of self-justification, self-dependence clothed in godliness, using religion and spirituality for personal gain, for riches and notoriety - this is Jesus condemnation of self-promotion veiled in spirituality
- E. Why was Jesus so hard on the Pharisees?
1. Instead of making a way for the Messiah, the savior of the world – they stood in the way – instead of preparing the way, like the John the Baptist, they were a barrier, a stumbling block
 2. And because that pharisaical mindsets can exist within all of us, we can find ourselves in that same place – instead of preparing the way for people to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus, we can stand in the way
 3. This is a warning to every child of God

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.

II. MOSES’ SEAT

- A. Before Jesus addresses the Pharisees, He addresses the crowds
1. Starts by saying “the scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat”
 2. To understand Moses seat, we have to understand how professors and teachers and Rabbis taught their students in Jesus’ day
 3. The teacher would sit in a chair and the students would sit on the floor at their teacher’s feet
 - a) Universities still have chairmen or chairpersons – or simply a chair of a department who is responsible to manage that department
 4. It was a position of authority – helps us to understand the relationship that Mary had with Jesus as she listened at the feet of Jesus
- B. If you sat in Moses seat or his chair – you were an authority on the Mosaic Law
1. People would come to you to explain the things that God had given to His chosen people through Moses
 2. The Pharisees had a very good grasp on the Mosaic Law – by the age of 12 they would have memorized the Torah – Genesis through Deuteronomy and then as a teenager would have memorized the prophets and the Psalms
 3. 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

- a) Then Jesus adds but don't do what they do because they don't practice what they preach.
- C. That is why you see the repetition of the word "hypocrites" used throughout chapter 23
- 1. They are not who they make themselves out to be. That is where we have to begin
 - 2. Do you want to get in the way of people coming to know Jesus? Try to be something that you're
 - a) Be fake, be phony – instead of going to a Bible Study to learn and grow, go to show everyone how much you know about the Bible
 - b) When you're struggling with doubt or confusion make sure your project confidence instead
 - c) When you've fallen into habitual sin, don't tell anyone – overcompensate – in fact be incredibly hard on others to take the attention of yourself
 - 3. That is something that as a teacher, I have to be deeply concerned about – I can teach in a way that makes it seem like I have it all figured out when in reality, I'm just one beggar telling another beggar where to find food
- D. We make a way for Jesus when we are open and honest about who we are, when we are genuine and transparent, not when we try to be something we are not
- 1. Paul tells Timothy to love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith
 - 2. In a world that puts some much emphasis on the superficial, a follower of Jesus must be real

III. UNCONVERTED MINISTERS

- A. That is what made the Pharisees so dangerous – they were men who claimed to have the authority of God, but they did not even know God
- 1. They were unconverted ministers as Gilbert Tennet – a protestant evangelist in Colonial America – called them
 - 2. In his most famous sermon, "On the Danger of an Unconverted Ministry," he compared contemporary unconverted ministers to the biblical Pharisees described of the Gospels
 - 3. None can expect God's blessing upon their ministry, that are not called and sent of God into the ministry. And right reason will inform us, how unfit instruments they are to negotiate that work they pretend to do. Is a blind man fit to be a guide in a very dangerous place? Is a dead man fit to bring others to life? A mad man fit to give counsel in a matter of life and death? Is a possessed man fit to cast out devils? A rebel, an enemy to God, fit to be sent on an embassy of peace, to bring rebels into a state of friendship with God? A captive bound in the chains of darkness and guilt, a proper person to set others at liberty? A leper, or one that has plague-sores upon him, fit to be a good physician? Is an unexperienced sailor, one who has never been at sea in his life, fit to be a pilot, to keep vessels from being dashed to pieces upon rocks and sandbanks. Isn't an unconverted minister like a man who would teach others to swim before he has learned himself, and so is drowned in the act, and dies like a fool?
 - a) Don't get me wrong – the issue here isn't whether we are capable but whether we are called.
 - b) Is our primary motivation in ministry to call people to Jesus or call people to ourselves – to make His name known or our own.

- c) That is the hypocrisy – to play the part of someone who is concerned with the well-being of others when we are really just concerned with ourselves
- B. What do we need to watch out for? How do we know when we have entered into Pharisaical territory? How can we tell when we are standing in the way of Jesus instead of making a way for Jesus?
 - 1. We are better at placing burdens on others than we are at lifting them
 - 2. We are more concerned about impressing others than we are about pleasing God
 - 3. We do what we do for appreciation not out of appreciation

IV. MARKS OF A PHARISEE

- A. ***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.***
 - 1. The word picture here is something that the people of Jesus' time would understand. That of an over-incombered animal – donkey that is so weighed down that its legs are ready to break, it cannot even move.
 - 2. That is the kind of loveless behavior the Pharisees demonstrated – rules upon rules upon rules – hundreds of manmade laws that made pleasing God an impossibility – imagine the immense shame, guilt, and helplessness that this would bring
 - 3. ***Ezekiel 34:1 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"***
 - 4. And then we have the example of Jesus
 - a) ***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.***
 - b) The people had religious leaders, and houses of worship, an entire religious system but Jesus recognizes that they were still without a shepherd
 - c) When the true Shepherd arrives, He takes the burden of sin and death upon His own shoulders – the Pharisees would pile on while Jesus lifted burdens
 - 5. And so it should be with His disciples – Gal 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
- B. ***5 But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.***
 - 1. Phylacteries and borders - leather box tied around their head and wrist - inside were verses from the Torah - made them larger and larger so people could see them
 - 2. Tassels - prayer garment - longer the more holy
 - a) Using the trivial and superficial to project significance, importance

- b) What are our phylacteries and borders – titles, the letters that come after our names, that hunk of metal that drive around, the logo on our electronics, the university we went to, the charities we are a part of, the people we associate with, the name we drop
- c) What are the superficial ways we try to project our importance?
- 3. Compare that with how Jesus came into the world, how He started His ministry, who He associated with, how He prayed, how He announced His Kingship, how He demonstrated leadership through servanthood, how He conquered sin and death
 - a) His substance wasn't in His appearance but in His actions
 - b) If we want to get in the way of Jesus instead of making a way for Him, spend more time on appearing to be something than actually being something

C. 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.'

- 1. They loved the praise and adoration that their positions afforded them
- 2. Be very leery of a man or woman who is too comfortable with the praise of others, including ourselves
- 3. The one who stands in the way of Jesus will never be comfortable with serving Jesus in anonymity – Jesus can get the glory as long as I am getting some to
- 4. But listen to what Paul writes *in Gal 1:10 For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.*
 - a) The idea of pleasing man and receiving the praise of man is not compatible with serving with God

V. THERE IS ONLY ONE DESERVING OF PRAISE

A. 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.

- 1. Paul said follow me as I follow Christ. Jesus was His ultimate authority, so as he followed Jesus, he provided a path for others to follow as well.
- 2. But these Pharisees, despite proclaiming to be men of God, did not follow God. They were their own final authority.
- 3. These titles of authority – Rabbi, Teacher, Father – there is only one who is deserving of that praise!

B. As Jesus speaks to the crowds, He was telling them do not follow these men – they are not true shepherds. They do not bear the marks of a true shepherd

- 1. And what are those marks? - humility, authenticity, compassion, and servanthood
- 2. Those are the characteristics of the one who prepares the way for Jesus
- 3. Now that Jesus is done addressing the crowds, He turns His attention to the very men He is warning the people about