



Tough Words from Jesus Pt 3: Outward Homage, Inward Homicide!

February 19, 2023

Holy Text: Matthew 23:29-36

Last week, we read Christ's pronouncements of woe upon the spiritual leaders of Israel:

1. The first "woe" concerns the Scribes and Pharisees tendency to hinder God's work. (v.13)
2. The second "woe" is about their fake spirituality, praying long prayers while hurting widows! (v.14. Note, verse 14 is not in some Bibles.)
3. The third "woe" concerned their misdirected zeal, going to extreme lengths to create proselytes devoid of spiritual truth! (v.15)
4. The fourth "woe" came due to their deceptiveness or dishonest reasoning concerning their spiritual obligations. They were masters at creating loopholes for disobedience. (vv.16-22)
5. The fifth "woe" chastises their misplaced spiritual priorities. They spent much of their time enforcing smaller matters (gnats), and missed the big picture (camels)! (vv.23-24)
6. The sixth "woe" condemns their outer appearance vs. their inner corruption. Jesus accuses them of "looking the part" while harboring hearts filled with desires to unlawfully obtain possessions through force or threat...and to enjoy such ill-gotten gains! (vv.25-26)
7. The seventh "woe" continues the rebuke from the sixth, but focuses on the nature and severity of the Pharisees' inner wickedness. Christ called them defiled and dead on the inside! Their sin is made the worse because of their "beauty" on the outside!

We attempted to provide healthy applications based on each of these woes, and prayed for God's forgiveness and mercy as we attempt to lead in a manner pleasing to Him. Today, we'll look at the Eighth Woe...

Outward Homage, Inward Homicide!

Matthew 23:29 (KJV) Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

- Our LORD's rebuke here centers around the Scribes and Pharisees' treatment of the prophets.
- In verse 29, Jesus begins by mentioning their building of tombs with decorations, as if they truly revered the prophets. At first glance, such activity might seem like a good thing! One commentary says:

It must have appeared to be in itself a very seemly thing, this honouring of the great and good men of former generations, to whom the religion of Israel owed so much. It must, therefore, have been startling to such men to hear Christ's sarcastic comment upon this apparently praiseworthy movement, and to find Him denouncing it as an aggravation of the sin of those who were promoting it, and basing on it a charge against them of insincerity and hypocrisy. It was true, doubtless, as any cynic in Jerusalem might have pointed out to them, that those prophets, whom they were so eager to honour now that they were dead, had met with very different treatment while they were living. But their answer would have been, "We sorrowfully confess it. That is the very reason for this zeal in sepulchre building. We mean by this to dissociate ourselves from the conduct of our fathers. It is our way of putting on permanent record our protest against their sin, and our conviction that if we had been in the day of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. It expresses a genuine national repentance and desire to make reparation." And there were obvious and indisputable facts which seemed to go a considerable way to justify such an attitude. They were fairly entitled to say, "Is there not an immense difference between our religious condition 'to-day and that of our fathers who persecuted the prophets? What were the sins which the prophets rebuked? Were they not idolatry, the worship of Jehovah fearfully corrupted by the admixture of polluted rites adopted from the

Canaanite and Phœnician religions, altars on high places and in sacred groves, associated with gross licentiousness? Have we not changed all that? If the prophets were to come back today, is there a single one of these points on which they could challenge our conduct? Are not their demands carried out by us most scrupulously? Where, then, is the insincerity in our honouring them, since we are obeying them?" And so far the defence would have been plausible.¹

Matthew 23:30 (KJV) And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

- But their outer veneration was hypocritical! It was lip-service. It was for show!
- Jesus continues by calling out their delusional mindset. They actually thought THEY would have responded differently to the prophets.
- The implication from Christ is that THEY WOULD NOT.

Matthew 23:31 (KJV) Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

- Our LORD's way denouncing their hypocrisy was to show them their familial and spiritual association the prophet killers of the past: their fathers!
- William MacDonald said "children" is used "in the sense of meaning people with the same characteristics. He knew that even as they were decorating the prophets' graves, they were plotting His death. Second, in showing such respect for the dead prophets, they were saying, 'The only prophets we like are dead ones.' In this sense also they were sons of their fathers."

Matthew 23:32 (KJV) Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

- That they were their father's children is illustrated in the "full measure" of their duplicity. They were not only capable of the same...they were proving it by their continual plotting to murder Christ!

Matthew 12:14 (KJV) Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

Mark 3:6 (KJV) And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

John 8:58-59 (KJV) Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. 59 Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

Matthew 27:1 (KJV) When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death:

Matthew 23:33 (KJV) Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

- Jesus called them what they were: snakes. Subtil and charming but poisonous! David spoke of such men...

Psalms 58:1-7 (KJV) To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David. Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men? 2 Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth. 3

¹ Preacher's Homiletical Commentary.

The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. 4 Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; 5 Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely. 6 Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD. 7 Let them melt away as waters which run continually: when he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces.

- They truly were of their true father...the devil! To them Jesus said:

John 8:37-45 (KJV) *I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. 38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. 39 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. 40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. 41 Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. 42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. 43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. 44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. 45 And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.*

- And like the devil, they were destined to damnation:

Revelation 20:10 (KJV) *And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

Matthew 23:34 (KJV) *Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:*

- This verse describes FUTURE persecution!
- Our LORD would prove their rebellion against God's truth (that they denied) by sending future leaders whom they again would persecute!
- And this happened! Christ send His disciples. (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 2) He sent men like Stephen. (Acts 7) He sent His church!
- Some were ran out of cities (Acts 14:5-7), some beaten (Acts 5:40), others killed with the sword (Acts 12:2), and some stoned (Acts 14:19).
- Ray Comfort lists some of these men his book, *God has a Wonderful Plan for your Life*, and their fate:

Philip: Crucified, Phrygia, A.D. 54

Matthew: Beheaded, Ethiopia, A.D. 60

Barnabas: Burned to death, Cyprus, A.D. 64

Mark: Dragged to death, Cyprus, A.D. 64

James (the Less): Clubbed to death, Jerusalem, A.D. 66

Paul: Beheaded, Rome, A.D. 66

Peter: Crucified, Rome, A.D. 69
Andrew: Crucified, Achaia, A.D. 70
Thomas: Speared to death, Calamina, A.D. 70
Luke: Hanged, Athens, A.D. 93

Matthew 23:35 (KJV) *That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.*

- Christ places upon the scribes and Pharisees the judgment of the first martyr (Abel, Gen 4:8) to the last in the OT (Zacharias son of Barachias), who was killed on the Temple grounds!
- These leaders were emblematic of all who hate God's truth. Upon them would come unimaginable woe and destruction, which happened catastrophically in 70AD.

Matthew 23:36 (KJV) *Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.*

- We have studied the phrase "this generation" extensively. We may review a bit next week.
- But understand our LORD's point: when God's prophets (who herald His Word) are ignored, judgment comes!

Persecution of the Prophets

God sent prophets out of His holy and fervent love for His people. He "arose early" and sent them, but God's people often would not hear:

Jeremiah 7:13 (KJV) *And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not;*

Jeremiah 11:7-8 (KJV) *For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice. 8 Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one in the imagination of their evil heart: therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do; but they did them not.*

Jeremiah 25:4-11 (KJV) *And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear. 5 They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: 6 And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. 7 Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. 8 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, 9 Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. 10 Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. 11 And this*

whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

Because the words of the prophets were so distasteful in the ears of God's people, they were often persecuted, some even killed...

Amos 7:10-13 (KJV) Then **Amaziah** the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. **11** For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. **12** Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: **13** But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court.

1 Kings 19:1-4 (KJV) And Ahab told Jezebel all that **Elijah** had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. **2** Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time. **3** And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. **4** But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

1 Kings 22:24-28 (KJV) But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote **Micaiah** on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee? **25** And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself. **26** And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; **27** And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace. **28** And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.

Jeremiah 20:1-2 (KJV) Now Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who was also chief governor in the house of the LORD, heard that **Jeremiah** prophesied these things. **2** Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the LORD.

Jeremiah 37:15-16 (KJV) Wherefore the princes were wroth with **Jeremiah**, and smote him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe: for they had made that the prison. **16** When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah had remained there many days;

Jeremiah 26:20-23 (KJV) And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the LORD, **Urijah** the son of Shemaiah of Kirjathjearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah: **21** And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death: but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt; **22** And Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, namely, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and certain men with him into Egypt. **23** And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people.

2 Chronicles 24:20-22 (KJV) *And the Spirit of God came upon **Zechariah** the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. **21** And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD. **22** Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it.*

Why do we, even believers, struggle with (and sometimes hate) the Truth so much?

1. Conviction or our sins?
2. Inconvenience in our daily living?
3. Pride?
4. Cultural assimilation?
5. Our Sin Nature?
6. Unbelief?
7. Demonic deception?

Our primary application today is to further develop a love for God's Truth, even accepting and obeying the prophetic voice that would herald it!

- **Psalms 1:1-6 (KJV)** *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. **2** But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. **3** And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. **4** The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. **5** Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. **6** For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.*
- **Psalms 112:1 (KJV)** *Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.*
- **Psalms 119:48 (KJV)** *My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.*
- **Psalms 119:97 (KJV) MEM.** *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*

When God's Truth thunders forth...let us do the opposite of the Scribes and Pharisees who fought it. Let us instead humbly embrace God's Word. Scripture says:

Romans 10:13-17 (KJV) *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. **14** How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? **15** And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! **16** But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? **17** So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

Amen.