



Tough Words from Jesus Pt 4: The Love of Christ, the Judgment of God

February 26, 2023

Holy Text: Matthew 23:37-39

So we have seen that as our LORD's conflict with the religious leaders of Israel has ramped up throughout Matthew's Gospel, so has the vociferousness of Christ's words towards them, culminating in eight blistering woes!

First, we noted the Pharisees and Scribes' "High Talk and Low Walk:"

There were several applications. Noteworthy were these:

1. Christ knew His enemies and His mission.
2. There may come a time where enemies of Christ must be publicly called out.
3. Authority, in and of itself, isn't ungodly...
4. However, those in authority are held to a higher standard. They must live what they lead!
5. Leaders must shun the prideful desire to be praised by men.
6. Leaders must never succumb to legalism and must help those they lead follow Jesus.
7. Leaders must temper themselves in expectations of honor, don humble dress, and...
8. Leaders must realize they are simply a the brothers of those they lead.
9. Christ calls us all to humble service!

Then we looked at and learned from the first Seven Woes:

1. The first "woe" concerned the Scribes and Pharisees tendency to hinder God's work. (v.13)
2. The second "woe" was 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" chastised 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" condemned 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" continued the rebuke from the sixth, but focused 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!

Last week, we were reminded again that the enemies of Christ expressed an Outward Homage, but cultivated an Inward Homicide!

1. They built the tombs of the prophets and decorated them. They believed that they, unlike their fathers, would not have persecuted and killed the messengers of God. (vv.29-30)
2. But they witnessed against themselves, associating themselves with prophet-killers both in lineage and in temperament. (v.31)
3. Indeed, they "filled up the measure" of their fathers (Going beyond them!) by plotting to kill the Son of God...the Priest, Prophet and King come in the flesh! (v.32) Not only WOULD they have done what their fathers did...they were WORSE!
4. Jesus called them serpents and vipers and damned them to hell. (v.33)
5. Christ would prove their pride and stiff-neckedness by sending them even more prophets. They would persecute, kill, and crucify them too! (v.34)

6. Because of these things, great judgment would come upon them. The wrath of God, building over the centuries for His people refusing to hear the prophetic voice, would fall upon that generation! (vv.35-36) More below...
7. We learned that we are also susceptible to rejecting God's Word. May the LORD cause our eyes to see and ears to hear!

Today, our desire is to say again that our LORD's words, although filled with righteous and deserved anger, **are still filled with divine love**. Despite His love however, a terrible judgment would fall...

First, the Love of Christ...

Matthew 23:37 (KJV) *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*

1. Many commentators and Bible paragraph headings describe this verse as a *lament*. This word means "To mourn; to grieve; to weep or wail; to express sorrow."¹ Laments in Scripture. Remember Jeremiah's mournful lament over Judah?

Jeremiah 4:19-31 (KJV) *My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. 20 Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled: suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment. 21 How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet? 22 For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. 23 I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. 24 I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. 25 I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. 26 I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger. 27 For thus hath the LORD said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end. 28 For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black: because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it. 29 The whole city shall flee for the noise of the horsemen and bowmen; they shall go into thickets, and climb up upon the rocks: every city shall be forsaken, and not a man dwell therein. 30 And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do? Though thou clothest thyself with crimson, though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; thy lovers will despise thee, they will seek thy life. 31 For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, and the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, that bewaileth herself, that spreadeth her hands, saying, Woe is me now! for my soul is wearied because of murderers.*

Lamentations 2:7-11 (KJV) *The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the LORD, as in the day of a solemn feast. 8 The*

¹ The Webster 1828 Dictionary

LORD hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion: he hath stretched out a line, he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying: therefore he made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together. 9 Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD. 10 The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground. 11 Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city.

Jeremiah 9:1 (KJV) *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*

2. **Beloved, Christ isn't happy that Israel's leaders are so obstinate; on the contrary, it reads like He is extremely sad, filled with regret on their behalf, or even heartbroken.**
3. Like Jeremiah's tearful words, the phrase, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem" is filled with fatherly sorrow and prophetic frustration. One can read it and sense our LORD's deep love, but also, His holy resolve.
4. Remember, Jerusalem:
 - Was the holy city!

Isaiah 52:1 (KJV) *Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.*
 - Was Chosen by God!

2 Chronicles 6:6 (KJV) *But I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there; and have chosen David to be over my people Israel.*
 - Was Designed to be Beautiful!

Psalms 48:2 (KJV) *Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.*
 - And was defended by God!

Isaiah 31:5 (KJV) *As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it.*
5. Jerusalem is emblematic of all of Israel, God's chosen people, through whom would come God's great Salvation in Christ. In Jerusalem was the Temple of God, the theological and social identity of God's people and the resting place of God's Presence! Yet the "holy city" rejected those sent to her and stoned (a vicious kind of killing) those sent to her!
6. **But Christ's love is yet evident. He said He often desired to gather up His people and protect them, like a hen who gathers and spreads her wings over her chicks!**
7. But the next phrase is telling: "...and ye would not." Not "could not." **WOULD NOT.** Their rebellion wasn't an issue of capacity; it was one of contempt. And it was common...
8. The LORD said to Moses on the mountain when Israel created the golden calf:

Exodus 32:7-10 (KJV) *And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: 8*

They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. **9** And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: **10** Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.

9. The Word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying:

Zechariah 7:11-12 (KJV) But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. **12** Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.

10. Indeed, there is a LONG history of God's people refusing God's Word. Judgment was coming now. But Jesus hurt over their sin and coming woe. Luke's Gospel says:

Luke 19:41-44 (KJV) And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, **42** Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. **43** For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, **44** And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

God really does love His hard-headed people!

Oh friends, don't get this twisted. Again, God isn't happy about their judgment. He really does love His people!

Deuteronomy 10:12-16 (KJV) And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, **13** To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? **14** Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD'S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. **15** Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. **16** Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

Jeremiah 31:3-4 (KJV) The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. **4** Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry.

Zephaniah 3:17 (KJV) The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

John 16:27 (KJV) For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

Ephesians 2:4-8 (KJV) *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

2 Thessalonians 2:13 (KJV) *But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:*

2 Thessalonians 2:15-17 (KJV) *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. 16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, 17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.*

Nevertheless, the Judgment of God did come...

Matthew 23:38 (KJV) *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*

Beloved, God's manifest Presence would leave the Temple, and it would be destroyed in 70 AD (as it is to this day). Here is the historian Josephus, describing the attack on Jerusalem and the Temple's destruction. Woe, woe, woe indeed!

"...the rebels shortly after attacked the Romans again, and a clash followed between the guards of the sanctuary and the troops who were putting out the fire inside the inner court; the latter routed the Jews and followed in hot pursuit right up to the Temple itself. Then one of the soldiers, without awaiting any orders and with no dread of so momentous a deed, but urged on by some supernatural force, snatched a blazing piece of wood and, climbing on another soldier's back, hurled the flaming brand through a low golden window that gave access, on the north side, to the rooms that surrounded the sanctuary. As the flames shot up, the Jews let out a shout of dismay that matched the tragedy; they flocked to the rescue, with no thought of sparing their lives or husbanding their strength; for the sacred structure that they had constantly guarded with such devotion was vanishing before their very eyes.

"Most of the slain were peaceful citizens, weak and unarmed, and they were butchered where they were caught. The heap of corpses mounted higher and higher about the altar; a stream of blood flowed down the Temple's steps, and the bodies of those slain at the top slipped to the bottom."

"When Caesar failed to restrain the fury of his frenzied soldiers, and the fire could not be checked, he entered the building with his generals and looked at the holy place of the sanctuary and all its furnishings, which exceeded by far the accounts current in foreign lands and fully justified their splendid repute in our own."

As the flames had not yet penetrated to the inner sanctum, but were consuming the chambers that surrounded the sanctuary, Titus assumed correctly that there was still time to save the structure; he ran out and by personal appeals he endeavored to persuade his men to put out the

fire, instructing Liberalius, a centurion of his bodyguard of lancers, to club any of the men who disobeyed his orders. But their respect for Caesar and their fear of the centurion's staff who was trying to check them were overpowered by their rage, their detestation of the Jews, and an utterly uncontrolled lust for battle.

"Most of them were spurred on, moreover, by the expectation of loot, convinced that the interior was full of money and dazzled by observing that everything around them was made of gold. But they were forestalled by one of those who had entered into the building, and who, when Caesar dashed out to restrain the troops, pushed a firebrand, in the darkness, into the hinges of the gate. Then, when the flames suddenly shot up from the interior, Caesar and his generals withdrew, and no one was left to prevent those outside from kindling the blaze. Thus, in defiance of Caesar's wishes, the Temple was set on fire.

"The Temple Mount, everywhere enveloped in flames, seemed to be boiling over from its base; yet the blood seemed more abundant than the flames and the numbers of the slain greater than those of the slayers. The soldiers climbed over heaps of bodies as they chased the fugitives."²

And Yet there is hope!

Matthew 23:39 (KJV) For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

1. There are different views on this verse. Some say it refers to Christ's Second Advent (Arrival/Coming), which is certainly possible.
2. But a prerequisite of "seeing" Him is a humble and repentant heart. The Psalm Christ is quoting here says this:

Psalms 118:25-29 (KJV) Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. 26 Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD. 27 God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. 28 Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. 29 O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

3. Our God saves! Our God is the LORD! He has showed us light and is worthy of praise!
4. This Psalm would be uttered by those expectantly and humbly waiting upon the Messiah.
5. The word for "see" in Matt 23:39 in Greek can also mean "know, receive, or understand."
6. Might Christ be saying to all who would hear that if they would humble themselves and repent of their sins, they would understand His identity and mission...truly "see" Him? Sound familiar? (2 Chr 7:14)
7. **May the stubborn heart soften. May the stiff-necked bow the knee. May the prophet-killer truly repent and give thanks unto the LORD. He is good! His mercy endureth forever!**

Amen!

² <https://calvaryreformationchurch.org/sermons/2014/8/mark-13-1-2-some-thoughts-on-judgment>