Hypocrisy
Matthew 23:13-39
January 13th, 2019

Big idea: Jesus is grieved, angry, and sorrowful at the judgment awaiting unrepentant hypocrites.

Intro

Sometimes people need to be shocked into awareness and action, even if it is painful to do so.

Imagine a professor at a community college. Students come to him from many different local school districts. He knows in one high school that the students have been poorly prepared. For whatever reason, the school has been ineffective at teaching students to read critically and write clearly. Suppose an “A” student from that school comes to his classroom and writes an abominable essay. The student thinks its great, this type of work always earned her an A at her high school. But the professor knows better. He knows she will be ill prepared for the rest of college and crash and burn in the work place. He could let her slide, grade “compassionately,” and pretend everything is fine. But will He be helping her? Not in the long run.

Doctor speaking with a patient whose sedentary lifestyle and chronic overeating is clogging her arteries.

Dental hygienist speaking with someone whose diet of sweet tarts and lack of brushing is decaying his teeth.

Counselor addressing a man whose explosive anger is alienating his wife and teenage children.

In this passage we will listen in and Jesus has just such a shocking confrontation with a group of people.

We might not be the direct target audience of this confrontation, but we can learn from it and be challenged by it and perhaps convicted as well.

A.T. Robertson: “the rolling thunder of Christ’s wrath”

Alfred Plummer: “like thunder in their unanswerable severity, and like lightning in their unsparing exposure...they illuminate while they strike.”

And yet it ends not with an image of ferocity, like thunder, but of compassion spurned, of a mother hen who wanted to gather them in but they were unwilling

There is a recurring pattern in this passage that you can’t miss.

Woe
Hypocrites

Woe is an expression of compassion, anger, and sorrow.

Dan Doriani – Like a piano chord played with one hand, a woé has three notes: grief, anger, and sorrow. When something evil happens, the woé both condemns and laments that evil. The woes call for judgment, yet they say there is time to repent. The judgment is almost, but not quite, here. Jesus’ woes call for judgment and repentance, even at the last moment. The woes are the last attempt to rouse sleepers to flee as a forest fire races toward a wooden house. It mingles doom and pity with one last call to repent.

His aim is to win His opponents over not crush them.

In this climax in interaction with the scribes and Pharisees, He is giving them another chance to come to their senses and turn.

Luke 13:6-9 And He began telling this parable: “A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. 7 And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down!
Why does it even use up the ground? 8 "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

Some did repent and believe

Acts 15:5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews;

In John 7 Nicodemus appears to be defending Jesus to the other Pharisees. In John 19 he brought a fragrant spice for His burial after His death and before the resurrection.

A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be what he never intends to be. (Tom Ascol)

Not mere inconsistency but pretending to be something that you’re not.

Difference between a malicious hypocrite who knowingly, intentionally deceives others and a sincere hypocrite, who first deceives himself and then others as well. That appears to be the Pharisees. They were committed to their rules and principles and traditions and were probably convinced they were right.

1. They kept themselves and others from the kingdom, (23:13)

   a. Jesus said it’s the poor in spirit who enter the kingdom

      i. Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

      ii. Those who see their own need rather than deny it or puff themselves up in pride

      iii. Matthew 18:3-4 "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

   b. When people started to respond to Him, they shut the crowds down and did all they could to dissuade them.

      i. Matthew 9:33-34 After the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." 34 But the Pharisees were saying, "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons."

   c. Why are they hypocrites for this?

      i. They claim to teach God’s way, claim to be waiting for the Messiah, yet when the Messiah comes they not only reject him they lead others away.

   d. Your Bible probably has a note about verse 14. It’s not in the earliest and best manuscripts so there is reason to think it doesn’t belong here.

      i. Luke 20:47 contains a near identical statement so it’s not “unbiblical” but most modern translations either don’t include it or they put a marginal note.

      ii. Luke 20:46-47 "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

      iii. Something like that shouldn’t bother the Christian. We can be grateful for the transparency in our translations.
2. They were zealous but harmful in their teaching. (23:15)
   a. The word for proselyte literally means to come or come over.
   b. There was a missionary zeal to Judaism and particularly to pharisiasm at this time.
   c. Traveling over land and sea was difficult, not a pleasure cruise, indicating they went to great lengths to convert someone to their views.
   d. But they passed on their loaded system of hypocrisy to the next spiritual generation who took it and ran even harder, thus making them “twice as much a son of hell.”
      i. The proselytes out phariseed the Pharisees.
      ii. Odonnell – like English doctors during the early phase of the bubonic plague who told the sick to leave London for the fresh air of the country, in doing so, they spread the disease throughout the nation.
3. They manipulated oaths to avoid honesty. (23:16-22)
   a. Adds the phrase, “blind guides” to emphasize the way they are leading but leading blindly.
   b. Jesus had already addressed the misuse of oaths in the sermon on the mount in chapter 5
      i. Matthew 5:33-37 “Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.’ 34 “But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. 36 “Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.
      ii. As discussed more than a year ago, the problem was they were taking something that was meant to ensure honesty (sweating an oath) and using it to be dishonest.
   c. “I didn’t swear by the gold of the temple, just the temple so I don’t have to …”
      i. They attempted to use evasive oaths in order to lie. He argues that all oaths are in some way related to God and are therefore binding. We are to simply tell the truth.
      ii. Like the child who makes a promise but has her fingers crossed behind her back, “Aha! The promise is invalid because my fingers negated it!”
   d. In v 17 He even calls them fools because it is foolish to think God is going to be fooled by a distinction in words used.
   e. He draws attention in vv 22-23 to the God who dwells in the temple and sits enthroned in heaven. It’s before this God that we must be honest.
4. They focused on the minitua but overlooked the weighty. (23:23-24)
   a. The chiastic structure of the woes places the emphasis on this middle woe. Carson
      i. Like we might put the most important point at the beginning or end, they sometimes placed it in the middle with a certain structure that would draw attention to this one.
   b. Demonstrates a commitment to fulfill the tithe to the minutest detail. The problem was that they didn’t have the same commitment to fulfill justice, mercy, and faithfulness
   c. Weightier does not mean more difficult or harder but more central or more important versus peripheral or trifling. Carson
      i. Analogy – person who commits to be fit in the New Year. They pay close attention to the new shoes that they buy, tie the laces with a tight double knot, then retie it because it was a little off
and they don’t want to twist their ankle while they do their workout routine. They pick out just
the right clothes that are breathable and stylish but doesn't look like they are trying too hard.
Meanwhile they are pounding cinnamon rolls two at a time and chasing it down with an extra
large milkshake.

ii. Attention to shoes is good, cutting out the sweets and fats would be much better.

iii. That’s why he said they strained out a gnat but swallowed a camel.

1. Contact with a dead animal caused someone to be ritually defiled. So they debated,
what if a gnat is flying and falls into your drink and you accidently drink it. Are you
defiled? So they strained their drinks. Of course they didn't literally swallow a camel.

d. All the commands fall under the categories of loving God or loving people.

i. Matthew 22:37-40 And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR
HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." 38 "This is the great and
foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS
YOURSELF.' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

ii. Hosea 6:6 For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than
burnt offerings.

e. They failed to show mercy by prioritizing additional Sabbath burdens over people.

i. Matthew 12:9-10 Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. 10 And a man was there
whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the
Sabbath?"-- so that they might accuse Him. 11 And He said to them, "What man is there among
you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not
take hold of it and lift it
out? 12 "How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on
the Sabbath." 13 Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out, and it
was restored to normal, like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as
to how they might destroy Him.

f. Exemplified by the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son. (Luke 15:11-32)

i. Summarize the first half, (man had TWO sons), Read 15:25-32

5. They improved their appearance but ignored the heart. (23:25-28)

a. He compares them to a cup that was clean on the outside but filthy on the inside.

i. Which is more important for a cup that you would drink from?

1. Ever leave a coffee cup for several weeks and find a moldy ring inside it? Would you
want to drink from that?

2. What if the inside was spotless but the outside was grubby? That wouldn’t be great
either but if those were your only options, you would probably choose the cup with the
dirty outside.

3. In reality, if you clean the inside of the cup, the outside will tend to get clean also.

4. Priority is on inner transformation that extends to an outer effect. When someone is
changed internally by a work of the Spirit, it trickles out to the observable as well.

ii. The tombs that were whitewashed refers to a practice during the month right before the
Passover. Tombs were not only in a cemetery, they could be spread around and someone might
unintentionally touch one and make themselves defiled and unable to participate in the
Passover celebration. So they whitewashed tombs with a lime mixture just prior to the Passover.
It did have a beautifying effect on them, but they were still full of bones inside and uncleanness inside.

1. Jesus says that is like the Pharisees and scribe – the outwardly appear righteous but are inwardly full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

b. The outside of the cup for their lives referred to these rigorous Sabbath keeping, the appearance of spirituality, long prayers, giving that was noticed by people, etc.

c. But those things aren’t necessarily reflective of a heart for the Lord.

i. They were broadening their phylacteries and lengthening their tassels (23:5)

d. Application

i. Are you more bothered by someone who says they are a Christian but they smoke, or use some rough language, or have tattoos; or someone who says they are a Christian but is known for being prideful and difficult at the office, or harsh with their children, or financially greedy

6. They followed the pattern of rejecting the **prophets**. (23:29-35)

a. Evidently they looked back at their ancestors’ pattern of rejecting and even killing the prophets God sent to them and thinking, “We would never do that! If we were in their shoes, we would have responded to God’s call to repentance.”

i. But Jesus says to them, “you are doing the same thing now and you will with the first generation of the church as well.” It’s in that sense that they are “sons of those who murdered the prophets.” Not simply that they were descendants who were held accountable for the wrongs of their ancestors, but they were continuing the pattern themselves.

ii. Even then they were plotting His death.

1. **John 11:53** So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.


c. From Abel who was killed by his brother, Cain, to Zechariah, the last OT martyr

7. Jesus **lamented** the certain **judgment** they will face. (23:36-39)

a. Here we see the lament and sorrow and anger from the “woes” articulated.

i. If wants to gather them like a hen takes her chicks under her wings, but they were unwilling.

b. Within 40 years Jerusalem would be destroyed. The Jewish people would be scattered but preserved.

c. God does not delight in judgment, but He will judge. The stakes are high; you feel it in a passage like this.

8. Conclusion

a. Watch for hypocrisy

i. Is your religious practice the same in public and in private?

ii. Do you live for the divine audience or the human audience?

iii. Are you consistent?

1. Do you only do the right thing when someone “important” is around? Are you kind to your peers at work when the boss is around but harsh with the waiter?

b. Be more concerned about inner transformation than outer appearance.
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