



Tough Words from Jesus Pt 2: Seven Woes upon His Enemies!

February 12, 2023

Holy Text: Matthew 23:13-28

Last week, we saw our LORD's opening salvo upon His enemies...

Matthew 23:1-12 (KJV) Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, **2** Saying, *The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: 3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. 4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, 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 for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, 6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. 8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. 9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. 10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. 11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

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 godly...
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!

"Woe" is a serious word!

Today, we look at even harsher words, as Christ pronounces "woes" upon them! He's done this before...upon Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum:

Matthew 11:20-24 (KJV) Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: **21** *Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. 23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.*

While working through that Text, we said this about Woes in the Bible:

- Woe means "calamity, affliction, or misfortune." The use of woe in our Text is as an interjection (expresses emotion); it is an exclamation of grief. (Thayer)
- In Scripture, Woes are almost always associated with prophetic judgment. For example:

Isaiah 5:20-24 (KJV) *Woe* unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! **21** *Woe* unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! **22** *Woe* unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: **23** Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! **24** Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

Ezekiel 13:2-5 (KJV) Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the LORD; **3** Thus saith the Lord GOD; *Woe* unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! **4** O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. **5** Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD.

- Our LORD Jesus uses the word eight times in Matthew 23 against the scribes and Pharisees. He called them hypocrites, blind guides, and whitewashed tombs full of people's bones! His prophetic words are a blithering indictment of their religious false virtue, calumny (slander and false statements) and ardent unwillingness to believe in Him.
- When you hear "woe," watch out! :)

Seven Woes upon Christ's Enemies!

Matthew 23:13 (KJV) *But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.*

- The first "woe" concerns the Scribes and Pharisees tendency to hinder God's work.
- Although they sometimes taught the Law correctly, their overall spiritual impartation was harmful.
- They had created a system of works righteousness (as we'll see below) that if followed, would greatly miss the mark of God's grace in Christ.
- Such an evil system would not allow them or those that hear them to enter the Kingdom!
- Paul summed it up beautifully:

Romans 10:1-4 (KJV) Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. **2** For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. **3** For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. **4** For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Applications:

1. Be clear on the Gospel: the road to salvation in Christ...and preach no other!
 - **1 Corinthians 2:1-2 (KJV)** And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. **2** For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

- **1 Corinthians 15:1-4 (KJV)** Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; **2** By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. **3** For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; **4** And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:
- **Galatians 1:8-9 (KJV)** But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. **9** As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

2. Refuse to be one who attempts to hinder God's work!

- **1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 (KJV)** For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they *have* of the Jews: **15** Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: **16** Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.
- **Romans 14:13 (KJV)** Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.
- **Luke 17:1-2 (KJV)** Then said he unto the disciples, *It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!* **2** *It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.*

Matthew 23:14 (KJV) *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.*

- The second “woe” is about their fake spirituality. While making long prayers for show (pretense...to be seen of men), they stripped widows of their resources and livelihoods (one possible definition of “devour”).
- In other words, they were the equivalent of the late night preachers on television selling miracle oils. Typically, their marks are older women! “Woe unto them,” saith the LORD!
- The LORD's brother said:

James 1:27 (KJV) *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

- The “leaders” should have done the opposite: protect them!
- Again from Paul, the Church dealt with a similar type of issue:

2 Timothy 3:1-9 (KJV) *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. **2** For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, **3** Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, **4** Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; **5** Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. **6** For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers*

lusts, **7** Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. **8** Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. **9** But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was.

Titus 1:10-11 (KJV) For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: **11** Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

Applications:

1. Let us take care in how we treat and minister to the widow and orphan!
2. Let us do so with fear and trembling: "...therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation."

Matthew 23:15 (KJV) *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*

- "The third charge against them is misdirected zeal. They went to unimaginable lengths to make one convert, but after he was **won** they made him **twice as** wicked as themselves. A modern analogy is the zeal of false cults. One group is willing to knock on 700 doors to reach one person for their cause; but the final result is evil. As someone has said, "The most converted often become the most perverted." -William MacDonald

Applications:

1. The issue here wasn't their lack of effort; it was their lack of truth!
 2. We must ensure we are building (making disciples) on the sure foundation of God's Word (2 Tim 2:19) and the Rock of Christ (Matt 7:24-27; 1 Cor 10:4). Truth matters!
- **2 Corinthians 13:5-8 (KJV)** *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? **6** But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates. **7** Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates. **8** For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.*
 - **John 14:6 (KJV)** *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

Matthew 23:16-22 (KJV) *Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! **17** Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? **18** And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. **19** Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? **20** Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. **21** And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. **22** And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.*

- The fourth "woe" is due to their deceptiveness or dishonest reasoning. Again from MacDonald:

They had built up a false system of reasoning to evade the payment of vows. For instance, they taught that if you swore by **the temple**, you were not obligated to pay, but if you swore **by the gold of the temple**, then you must perform the vow. They said that swearing by the gift on the altar was binding, whereas swearing by the empty altar was not. Thus they valued gold above God (the temple was the house of God), and the gift on the altar (wealth of some form) above the altar itself. They were more interested in the material than the spiritual. They were more interested in getting (the gift) than in giving (the altar was the place of giving).

Addressing them as **blind guides**, Jesus exposed their sophistry. The gold of the temple took on special value only because it was associated with God's abode. It was the altar that gave value to the gift upon it. People who think that gold has intrinsic value are blind; it becomes valuable only as it is used for God's glory. Gifts given for carnal motives are valueless; those given to the Lord or in the Lord's Name have eternal value.

The fact is that whatever these Pharisees swore by, God was involved and they were obligated to fulfill the vow. Man cannot escape his obligations by specious reasonings. Vows are binding and promises must be kept. It is useless to appeal to technicalities to evade obligations.

Applications:

1. Be honest. Shun duplicity and subtle trickery in our doings! Don't live looking for loopholes!
2. Don't do this to Scripture!

Matthew 23:23-24 (KJV) *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. 24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.*

- The fifth "woe" chastises their misplaced spiritual priorities. They spent much of their time enforcing smaller matters (gnats), and missed the big picture (camels)!

Applications:

1. All obedience matters, but "weightier" doctrine matters even more, because of the implications and consequences of said doctrine on men's souls.
2. Don't put "weighty" and "small" against one another; do both!
3. Also, teach both. But give greater time to greater truths!

(Note: We must be very careful of what WE designate as "small" doctrine in Scripture. If it is in the Bible, it is important to God.)

Matthew 23:25-26 (KJV) *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. 26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*

- 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!
- Jesus always focuses on the heart. He said (as a result of Pharisee offense by the way):

Matthew 15:18-20 (KJV) *But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. 19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: 20 These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.*

Applications:

1. Seek the LORD for inner cleansing...real heart change.
2. Inner transformation will result in outer manifestation. Jesus wants both.

Matthew 23:27-28 (KJV) *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*

- The seventh “woe” continues the rebuke from the sixth, but focuses on the nature and severity of the Pharisees’ inner wickedness.
- “Tombs were whitewashed so that Jewish people would not inadvertently touch them and thus be ceremonially defiled. Jesus likened the scribes and Pharisees to **whitewashed tombs**, which looked clean on the outside but were full of corruption inside. Men thought that contact with these religious leaders would be sanctifying, but actually it was a defiling experience because they were full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” -MacDonald
- Christ is calling them defiled and dead on the inside! Their sin is made the worse because of their “beauty” on the outside!

Applications:

1. Admit to God areas of defilement, sickness and sin. He already knows!
2. Repent for such and ask for His Spirit to cleanse and fill us that we might be pleasing vessels, fit for His use. Indeed, may we pray like David...

Psalms 51:1-13 (KJV) *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. 5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. 6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. 9 Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. 11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. 12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. 13 Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

Amen!