

## Chapter Twenty Three

### *The Errors of the Pharisees*

#### I. Introduction

- A. Now Jesus focuses His attention on the errors of the ruling Religious Leaders
- B. He makes sure the people listening do not take His words as cause to riot and disobey, but that error must be confronted and corrected.
- C. These are strong words Jesus preaches! And they are still valid today!

#### II. Lesson - Jesus rebukes the Hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Scribes

##### A. Problems with the Pharisees (23:1-12)

1. Pharisees have **God given** authority to lead
  - a. They sit in “**Moses’** seat” (Mal 2:7)
  - b. In a God-ordained place of authority – both spiritual and governmental
2. Therefore obey the Pharisees
  - a. In **all** things
  - b. Just as a married woman is to obey her husband in **all** things – better be careful who you marry
  - c. Jesus is speaking to the Jews, including His followers
  - d. Jesus was NOT teaching His followers to REBEL
  - e. There are limits to the obedience (Mt 15:2-9; ACTS 5:29), but they are only **exceptions**
  - f. Obey all legal commandments
  - g. This applies to even ungodly civil authorities (Rom 13:1)
  - h. But when civil authorities command unlawful actions, reject those commandments!
3. Jesus is teaching Principles of a Christian Society
  - a. Obey those in government – whether they are in power by choice or by force
    - 1) Obey your **pastor**
    - 2) Your **parents**
    - 3) People older than you
    - 4) People in civil authority
  - b. Doing whatever they ask of you
  - c. Even do **more** than they ask of you
  - d. Until they ask you do go against the Scriptures
  - e. AND, **carefully** rebuke them when they are doing morally wrong (1Tim 5:19,20; Mark 6:18)
4. Just don't **emulate** their lives (the Pharisees)
  - a. It is very easy to pick up the lifestyles of apostates
  - b. It is much easier to live in hypocrisy than in honesty
5. Reject their way of living and “success” because they are hypocrites
  - a. They say, but they don't do (Lk 11:46)! Make sure that THAT is not true in your life, and in your Sunday School class, and in your home, and in our church!!!
  - b. They over-work people in their religious requirements
    - 1) **613** commandments in the Old Testament
    - 2) And the Pharisees enjoyed making sure everyone else obeyed all of them to the letter
    - 3) People are heavy laden by sins, but also by attempting to comply with a burdensome set of rules and requirements (Mt 11:28-30)
    - 4) Up until Acts 15, the mentality of the Pharisees permeated initial Christianity and had to be rejected (Acts 15:10)

- c. Yet they themselves live easy and unburdened (Gal 6:13)
  - 1) They were the beneficiaries of everyone's labours
  - 2) The same is true in many ministries today – pastors live far better than all their people, priests especially live fatter and better lives than all the poor they “minister” to
- d. They just want to be seen of men – they couldn't care less about what God thought of them
  - 1) They wore broad **phylacteries**
    - a) Large leather box bound to a wrist that were supposed to be small, and discrete (Dt 6:8)
    - b) Inside were Scripture portions that were worn to remind them of the laws of God.
  - 2) They wore large, long flowing garments that stood out from everyone else's clothes (Num 15:38,39; Mark 12:38). Luke says “long robes” (Luke 20:46)
  - 3) Sought for the uppermost seats and rooms at dinners and feast
    - a) Jesus had to stop His own disciples from wanting the pre-emminence (Mt 20:21)
    - b) He taught us to be low (Rom 12:10)
    - c) Ministers still today seek to have “the preeminence” (3John 1:9)
  - 4) Loved public greetings in the markets – the praise of men
  - 5) Loved to be called **Rabbi** (Teachers, Masters of religion, John 1:38) – constantly honoured
- 6. Do NOT allow such things among yourselves (Mt 23:8-10)
  - a. You have ONE **Master** – Jesus the Messiah
  - b. Ye are all only ever **brethren** – family (Mt 12:47-49). Jesus is even above His MOTHER
    - 1) Every church is equal in authority – there is no primal or overseeing church like in the ROMAN Catholic system
    - 2) Every believer is equal in authority – all are brethren
    - 3) Whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, barbarian or civilised (Gal 3:28)
  - c. Call no one on earth your **FATHER**
    - 1) Unless he actually IS (Ex 20:12; Eph 6:2)
    - 2) The idea is that people should not look to a man to “beget” (father) them into the kingdom of God
    - 3) Do not honour mere men as if they have the power to give you forgiveness
    - 4) There are fathers of a nation – Abraham, Isaac, etc
    - 5) There are spiritual mentors who are called fathers (2Kgs 2:12; 1Cor 4:15)
    - 6) But no one should be seeking the “**TITLE**” like the Pharisees and Roman Catholics do!
  - d. There is only ONE spiritual Father of Jesus' followers – the one in heaven. And he is referred to as “**Holy Father**”
  - e. People have another spiritual “father” before salvation (John 8:44) – the **DEVIL**
  - f. So, don't allow yourself to be called MASTER (like with the Japanese Ninjas)
  - g. There are masters, authorities, but they are not to live like they have dominion (James 3:1; 1Cor 4:15)
  - h. And don't allow people to think you have dominion over them in anything spiritual (2Cor 1:24)
    - 1) Parents have dominion over their home
    - 2) Governments have authorities over its people (Rom 13)
    - 3) Pastors have rule over their church (Heb 13:7)
    - 4) But no one has rule or dominion over a soul – only God does
- 7. If you want to be a MASTER – a “GREAT ONE”... (Mt 23:11-12)
  - a. You can't be.
  - b. The greatest will be **YOUR** servant (2Cor 4:5)

- c. You **MUST** humble yourself (1Pet 5:5; Jam 4:6) and serve others more than others are serving you!
  - d. **THEN** you will be the greatest
  - e. Everyone who does not humble themselves, **WILL** be humbled!
- B. **Eight Errors of the Pharisees** (23:13-33). These are the errors of all works based religions. “Woe unto you” is said eight times! Serious curses!
1. ***They Block people from Entering Heaven*** (23:13)
    - a. Refers to them all as:
      - 1) Scribes – doctors of the law, the best copiests
      - 2) Pharisees – supposedly Bible believing religious leaders
      - 3) **Hypocrites** – worst kind of faker – exposed!
    - b. They block SINNERS from getting in, and yet they are first in line with Jesus (Mt 21:31,32)
    - c. They do not teach HOW to be forgiven (Lk 11:52)
    - d. The Pharisees, and religionists were not even wanting to go in – just “expecting” to be in!
  2. ***They Devour the Weak*** (23:14)
    - a. Take advantage of widows, whose husbands have died
    - b. The only money or life they have is what their husbands have left them
    - c. And yet these religionists preyed on these widows – took advantage of their need for comfort and encouragement
    - d. They charged these widows money for their long prayers on behalf of their needs and situations
    - e. For a pretense - **A false display of feelings.**
    - f. They ended up wealthy while the widows lost their homes!
    - g. These Pharisees will receive the greater damnation!
      - 1) Damnation of hell (Mt 23:33)
      - 2) **Sodom** will get more mercy than the Pharisees of Jesus’ day (Mt 11:24)
      - 3) People who know more shall have more expected of them (Heb 10:29)
    - h. Funny... this verse is NOT in the N.I.V. or the Good News Bible, or the RSV or the ASV, or most any of the modern versions! I wonder why?
  3. ***They are Religious Fanatics instead of in love with God*** (23:15)
    - a. Proselytisers - to try to convert somebody to a religious faith or political doctrine
    - b. Compass – to encompass – go everywhere
    - c. Not soul-winning – only changing people from one religion to another
    - d. Once converted to Phariseeism, they are two-fold more damned than the Pharisees were
  4. ***They are False Teachers*** (23:16-22)
    - a. Blind **guides** – it was as if they, being blind, were attempting to describe and explain something they had never seen!!!
      - 1) Many people attempt to explain God
      - 2) Most do not know Him, nor His word
    - b. Falsely taught about Promises and Oaths
      - 1) Swearing – is **allowed**. You MUST keep your oaths, but it is better to not have to make any oath! Just be people of your word!
      - 2) Everyone was swearing by anything and everything, except by God
        - a) By gold
        - b) By the Temple itself
        - c) The temple altar

- d) A gift on the altar
  - e) By heaven (Mt 5:34)
  - f) By the earth
  - g) By Jerusalem
  - h) By your own head and life (Mt 5:36)
  - i) It is okay to swear by God and by His name (Lev 19:12; Deut 6:13; Isa 65:16)
  - j) God swears by Himself (Isa 45:23; Heb 6:13)
- 3) To swear, affirm by the authority of the temple was non binding – you didn't have to keep that promise or vow
- 4) However, to swear by the gold of the temple was binding. They considered the gold covering the walls, and the golden utensils far more sacred than any other part of the temple
- c. Jesus called them **FOOLS**
- 1) Which is greater, the gold or the Temple that sanctified, honoured the gold? To the Pharisees, the GOLD was more important, and more powerful
  - 2) Which is greater, the gifts on the altar or the Altar itself that sanctified the gifts?
  - 3) If you swear by the Altar you include all that are on it
  - 4) If you swear by the temple, you swear by all that is in it
  - 5) The idea is, you have to swear by the greatest thing that there is – GOD` (Heb 6:16,13)
- d. This is why Jesus said, just don't swear in your conversation at all – just be truthful and trustworthy in every word you say!
5. **They Are Gnat Strainers** (23:23,24)
- a. The Pharisees were tithers of **EVERYTHING** – they were very obedient to the smallest degree
    - 1) Not only of the money that they received
    - 2) But also if they received even the smallest herb, or if it grew in their window sill: Mint, Anise, Cummin
  - b. But they ignored the weightier matters of the law
    - 1) **Judgment** – for the oppressed and at risk (Prov 21:3; Micah 6:8)
    - 2) **Mercy** – to not exact so much of people
    - 3) **Faith** – trusting God instead of your own righteousness
  - c. It was right to tithe of everything, but more wrong to leave the other undone
  - d. Calls them blind guides, teaching what they know nothing about
    - 1) They were teaching this lifestyle to all the people
    - 2) And the danger was that the general people were unable to understand and value the bigger issues of the Old Testament Law
  - e. And then refers to them as gnat strainers – worrying about a tiny gnat in their milk, and yet swallowing whole a camel with no problem!!!
6. **They are Only Clean on the Outside** (23:25,26)
- a. The Pharisees spent all their time working on looking clean and looking right
  - b. All the while they were full of sin!
  - c. Example of modern religious leaders
    - 1) On the outside, they look perfect, and are nice
    - 2) But inside is full of pornography and paedophilia and extortion and lying
  - d. Jesus commands them to clean up the **INSIDE** first, and then the outside will be clean also!
  - e. Same is true with Christianity
    - 1) Get saved, and the cleansing works its way out

- 2) It is a lie to believe that you work inward with sanctification! It has to be outward!
- f. Notice that it is **RIGHT** to be clean on the outside – not the modern antinominalism that is out there today in modern churches that says live as dirty as possible and you still are okay!
7. ***They are Dead on the Inside*** (23:27,28)
- a. Like whited (**painted**) sepulchres – tombs
    - 1) Beautifully painted white and clean on the outside
    - 2) But full of death and bones
  - b. They all appeared righteous but were full of hypocrisy and sins!
  - c. These are all signs of **NOT** being born again, not being saved!
8. ***They Never Change*** – are the same as their ancestors (23:29-32)
- a. They were just as responsible for murdering the prophets as their parents were
  - b. They built the very tombs that they would end up filling with the bodies of prophes they did not agree with or like
  - c. They are a witness unto themselves – as they will be with Stephen in Acts 7
  - d. They may **SAY** they wouldn't have killed the prophets in the past, but they had the very same attitudes of their forefathers
  - e. They will fill-up, finish the job with Jesus and His disciples soon enough! Jesus basically says, go ahead and finish what you and your fathers have started!!!
9. ***No wonder they all are going to hell*** (23:33)
- a. Now Jesus gets right into their faces – like a dagger!
  - b. Calls them:
    - 1) **Serpents** (Gen 3)
    - 2) Children of poisonous snakes – children of **devils** (Mt 12:34)
  - c. How can you all escape the righteous damnation of hell for people like you!?
  - d. Proof beyond question of a future eternal judgment – not of **death** itself!
  - e. And yet, the people Jesus was referring to were Pharisees – the best of the religious of the day!
- C. **Jesus Judges That Generation** (23:34-39)
1. Jesus (“I send”) will send more prophets, wise men and scribes
    - a. Knowing that they would be persecuted and killed by the religious attitude of that day!
      - 1) Referring to the Apostles, evangelists and preachers
      - 2) Including Stephen (Acts 7:59) and James, and the Apostle Paul (2Cor 11:24,25)
    - b. But this is a partial quote of GOD almighty from Jeremiah 7:25 & 35:15
  2. That very generation would fill up all the sins of their fathers
    - a. Notice the use of two names
      - 1) **Abel** – killed by Cain in Genesis 4
      - 2) Until **Zacharias** the son of Barachias (2Chron 24:20-22)
    - b. Covering events from Genesis until 2 Chronicles
    - c. Proof that the apocrypha is rejected, and that the Hebrew canon stands – not the LXX or any other bible
    - d. All the judgment for all the blood shed for the previous 4,000 years was about to come against that very generation!
  3. Jesus pleads with all the people of Jerusalem (23:37-39)
    - a. Notice the **Grief of God!** O Jerusalem – what a lament like Jeremiah. He wants to save them from the wrath to come
    - b. Look at the **free-will of man** (see John 5:40)

- 1) I have tried to gather you
  - 2) Ye would not come!
- c. Look at the condemnation – the result of their rejection:
- 1) Their **HOUSE** is ruined
  - 2) Notice the word **DESOLATE** – pointing to a future abomination of desolation
- d. Jesus promises another coming – His Second Coming!
- 1) Not for His church – that will be secret
  - 2) But for His PEOPLE – the Jews – during the Tribulation
  - 3) THEN they as a HOUSE, a NATION will welcome Him!

### **III. Conclusion**

- A. In chapter 24, Jesus leaves the temple – leaves it empty and desolate
- B. He will speak plainly of coming wrath
- C. As a hen, Jesus has offered to save His people (Matthew 1:21), but they did not want to be saved
- D. They were only interested in promoting their form of godliness, and in the gold that religion accumulates, and in being praised by men!