

Madness: The King's Chastisement

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Bible Text: Matthew 23:1-33

Preached on: Sunday, March 10, 2013

I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bibles to the book of Matthew chapter 23. As you are turning to Matthew 23, I want to welcome you to one of the most scathing passages in all of the Bible. And yet it is a sermon of Jesus Christ. In Matthew chapter 23 we find ourselves in the Passion Week. We find ourselves in the last days of the life of Jesus. He is literally just a few hours from offering his life on the cross, shedding his blood for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of any and all who would receive and believe. And yet it is in this 23rd chapter of Matthew that Jesus has some very stark and striking words to communicate to a very select group of people.

The first few verses that we are going to read are addressed to a multitude. They are addressed to a crowd. And the reason that it is addressed to them is Jesus recognized something that every one of us struggles with. We struggle with the fact of not being whom we want to be and there is always somebody else we wish we were.

And in those days there was a group of people known as the Pharisees. Now that is a terminology if you have spent any time in church you typically hear in a very negative fashion. And we are going to see today there is a very negative light put upon this group of individuals. However, understand the Pharisees are a group of people whom everybody wanted to be like. They had the best jobs, the best incomes. They had power in the government. They had power in the Church. These were the guys whom everybody wanted to live in their neighborhood and everybody wanted their kids to date and marry their kids. These were the people that set the agenda for life.

Now why is that important for us to hear? Because I think every one of us looks somewhere else for guidance to what life should look like. And the word that Jesus uses so often in this passage is the word that gets such negative publicity and rightfully so. It is the word hypocrite. You know the word hypocrite literally means one whose actions do not match their words.

If we were to go back several centuries to the acting to the community, to the dramatic world, a hypocrite took place when they were doing a theater production and they did not have enough actors or actresses to play the parts in the play, one human being would play multiple parts. And they would either hold a sign or a mask in front of their face showing that when I read these lines I am playing this character.

Now the reason this is so important is that the people that everybody looked up to in Jesus' day had the same problem that most people today have. They are hypocrites. Their life in one location does not match their life in another location. What they speak does not match how they live. And from Matthew chapter 23 I am going to read 33 verses of Scripture and if you are a first time guest or visitor, I don't normally read a passage this

long, but this is one of those passages where it is truly hard to believe that Jesus, the same Jesus who walked on water, the same Jesus who healed people, both blind and crippled, would speak words this stark and striking.

In Matthew chapter 23 beginning in verse one it says:

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

Now I am going to take a small little break there, because in these 12 verses Jesus is saying to the multitudes and to his disciples, "We have got a struggle here." The struggle is those who are exemplifying life, those whom we like our life to look like, they are not doing as they are saying or saying as they are doing.

Beginning in verse 13 Jesus then turns to the Pharisees. Jesus then turns to these people who are the elite and religious ones, the ones everybody wanted to be and he opens his mouth and communicates like you may have never heard Jesus talk before.

Verse 13.

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. 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. 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. 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! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever

¹ Matthew 23:1-12.

swareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon. 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. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. 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. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. 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. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 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. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?²

So much for sweet little Jesus. Here comes Jesus Christ days before his crucifixion, before his resurrection, with such scathing words and he communicates about being a Pharisee. He communicates about being a hypocrite. And what Jesus is showing us today is that every one of us, sometimes intentionally, sometimes ignorantly, falls into the trap of living a life of contradiction rather than a life of consistency.

And so what I want to address today, if we were to take all these verses and begin to go verse by verse and phrase by phrase, it would take a great deal of time to unpack what did Jesus mean by the temple and the gift and the altars and all these things that at times are so foreign to us.

So what I want to do today is I want to break it down to be very simple. I want to break it down into a very easy, almost simple, process of how do we understand what Jesus was saying so we don't fall into the same trap that these guys did? And I want to talk about being a Pharisee. I want to talk about how we fall into the trap of saying one thing and doing another or living a life of contradiction.

And there are really two ways that this can happen. You can either become a Pharisee intentionally or in ignorance. Now let me unpack those for you. When I say an intentional

² Matthew 23:13-33.

Pharisee, I don't think anybody listening to my voice, I don't think any one of you woke up this morning and said, "I want to be a religious hypocrite." I don't think anybody woke up and said, "My goal in life is to say one thing, but to do another." When I say an intentional Pharisee, what I mean is that you have intentionally set up your life with certain boundaries and borders so that you believe that you can check off that box and everything is ok. It is not intentional in the motive as it is in the desire to think that your life is satisfactory and pleasurable and pleasing to God.

Now how do we do this? How do we become an intentional Pharisee? Well, the first way is simply this. We create a life that is designed around specific locations or specific geographical places. In other words, we see a church setting or we see this room drastically different than we would see the school we attend or the workplace that we go to or even our house or a place somewhere else on the other side of the world. And what happens is we fall into this trap when we say things like this:

"Well, I would say that story or I would tell you that joke, but I am not going to do it here at church."

Well, if you shouldn't tell it at church, don't tell it at work. If you shouldn't say that word here, don't say it there. And the problem is that we think that our life at a certain geographical location can look differently than at another geographical location and somehow that is ok with God.

Let me give you a very graphic illustration of how Traci and I saw this in our life. We were newlyweds and, as newlyweds there are several things that you possess. One is you have very limited friends, because most of your friends are still single right when you get married and you also don't have much money.

Well, it was a Sunday night and we had some friends that were part of a small church and they had invited us to come to the worship service. And we went because we knew most of the people there and had known them for years and it was one of those nights that was just pleasant all the way around. I mean, you get there and they are glad to see you. They already know us by name. They greet us with a smile. It is one of those things, you know, you always like to be in an environment where everybody kind of knows you and appreciates you and it is just... it was just a wonderful experience.

As we were leaving the worship service we were invited by several of the couples to go out to eat. Now, understand, this is a traumatic event in the life of a newlywed. Why? Because we had not budgeted for the meal that they were inviting us to and there was no indication that they were going to be paying for it or if we were going Dutch. So Traci and I discussed it real quickly, decided, you know what? It will be good fellowship. We need some new friends. This will be great. Let's go have dinner with them.

I want to share with you that that was one of the most revolting nights of our life. These individuals that just smiled and hugged us in the name of Jesus were despicable and demanding to the people who were employed by the restaurant. When they greeted us

with open arms and were so flexible, hey, just sit where you want, it doesn't matter, nobody cares. At the restaurant nothing was on time, nothing was right and they made it a very vocal scene. We have rarely been more embarrassed in our life and when the end of the meal came and they skimmed out on the tip, I wanted to crawl under the table.

And you wonder why an unbelieving world finds Christianity so unbelievable. When we hug people at church and we are rude to them in a restaurant; when we talk about being generous here and we are cheap out there; when we allow ourselves to create an environment where we will excuse behavior in one location, but not in another; we have intentionally become Pharisees, because we say it is ok, according to Matthew 23. Temple behavior, home behavior.

So sometimes it is a specific location of geography. And other times it becomes a specific day of the week. I know that you may have done some study or maybe you have an idea about this. You know, we worship on Sunday. This is the day that the Christian community for several thousand years has said, "This is the day that we join together. We celebrate and we worship. But you understand, sometimes we have an opinion of Sunday that is very contrary to Monday through Saturday. Maybe you have never struggled with this, but I have had people come to me before and mention something like this:

Pastor, what do you think about somebody who mows their yard on Sunday? Do you know what my response is? How tall is the grass? I don't know. And you think about it, because they struggle about the fact that, you know, it is the sabbath. Forget the fact that in Exodus 31:13 and Ezekiel 20:12 it says that the sabbath day was a sign between Israel and God.

Now let me give you a little asterisk here. I do believe we need a day of rest. I do believe that we need to pause and focus on the things of God. I get that. But do you realize if you advocate, you know, it is Sunday. You shouldn't do any work on Sunday. Then guys, you are going to have to stop watching football, because they are working on Sunday. You are going to have to quit eating out on Sunday, because when you go to a restaurant they are working on Sunday. And God forbid that on this day of the week if you go home and your heart rate goes up and you begin to feel pressure in your chest, don't call 911, because those are employees of a medical facility will come and visit you.

Do you see how we can live such a contradictory life that I am righteous because on a certain day of the week I don't participate in certain behaviors, but I expect everybody else to participate so that I am facilitated?

And I don't think you mean to be hard. I think you desire the right thing just like these guys, but it ends up materializing the wrong way. And so sometimes it is the environment or the location. Sometimes it is the day of the week. But sometimes it is this style or approach that we have when we worship God.

Now let me be very pointed with you for a moment, because I know this is our second service. I know that when you look at the worship guide, we call this the contemporary

service. And often times we can get caught up and prideful about that, because if we hear a choir special or if we hear a song that is old, it makes us cringe. And we say, “Why can’t the church just be contemporary?”

You do realize those old hymns at one point were contemporary. And the songs that you sing today that are new will be old one day. And the problem is that we begin to put God in a box and say, “Well, God can’t be honored in that style. God cannot be honored in that way.”

Let me give you a hint. Do you realize that most people on planet earth today who are worshipping Jesus Christ are not even doing it in English? So according to that methodology we are struggling because most people are doing it in other languages.

I am going to give you an example of a friend of mine who was at a Bible conference. He is a pastor like me. He was at this Bible conference and he was teaching and they were talking about worship and it was in John 4:24.

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”³

At the end of his Bible conference a man came up to him who was very upset, very frustrated. And some of you won’t like this, particularly in this service, because this man was just... I mean he was spitting venom because he did not believe that you could worship God with all that contemporary loud music. He was just upset about it. He was bothered. He thought you ought to worship a certain way at a certain time in a certain place to which my very wise, astute friend said, “Sir, can we continue this conversation out in your pickup truck?” He said, “Sure.”

So they went out to the pickup truck and he said to the man, “Sir, would you mind turning the ignition on?” So he did. He said, “Sir, would you mind if I mess with the radio controls?” He said, “Sure, go ahead.”

You know those preset buttons that are on the radio, he began to push every single button. Do you know what he found? There wasn’t a single station preset to gospel music. It was classic rock and country western. This story took place in Texas, ok?

Now understand we can fall into the same trap even if we are on the opposite end of the spectrum and say, “We need to be new, we need to be relevant, but we need to be contemporary.” But when we say, “But God can only be worshipped in this manner, in this way, in this location,” we have some serious issues we have got to deal with. That is how we become an intentional Pharisee. We mean the best. We desire to worship God, but the problem is it manifests itself in a very contradictory life.

And to be honest with you, I would be willing to say most of you hearing me in this service, most of you are probably not intentional Pharisees. Most of you probably aren’t geared that way. What happens is most of you have probably become what I want to call

³ John 4:24.

an ignorant Pharisee. I am not saying you are ignorant. Ignorance means literally that you fall into a situation or your step into it not meaning to. So when I use this term ignorant Pharisee, you never meant to become a Pharisee. You never meant a life of contradiction. It just somehow accidentally occurred in your life. In fact, you might want to say it better - an accidental Pharisee. What are the ways that that can happen in our life based on Matthew 23?

Here is the first one. You get caught up in the trap of compartmentalizing your life. Now we know what a compartment is, right? It is a small subset of something bigger. Probably one of the greatest examples of compartments is what we know as the famed cruise ship, the *Titanic*. You remember that famed cruise ship, the one that supposedly would never sink. The way that that ship was constructed was compartments after compartments; that if they struck an iceberg or if they ran aground then a certain amount of compartments could fill with water and as long as that blocked off the other compartments, they would be ok.

Let me tell you how we compartmentalize our life. We say, “Well, that is how I behave at work. This is how I behave at home. This is how I behave at church. This is how I behave on the ball field. This is how I behave with them and this is how I behave with those people.” We compartmentalize our lives and what happens is we end up adapting our life to the culture around us rather than transforming the culture.

Let me give you a couple of examples. Guys, I am going to pick on you, then, girls, I am going to pick on you. And it can go both ways. This is not a gender exclusive illustration, but I think it suits the purpose. Guys, there can come a time in your life where you are at the work place, you are at the gym, you are at a ball field, you are out at a restaurant, a bunch of guys. And for some reason whatsoever there is a young lady who is in your presence and the flirtation begins. And you don't mean it with harm. You mean it harmlessly. You begin to banter back and forth and make little innuendos toward her and she toward you. You realize that if you would not say those things with your wife eating dinner with you, you are compartmentalizing, because you are saying it is ok to act that way towards someone who is not my wife if my wife is not there, but if she were there, oh, I would never say those things.

And, ladies—and, by the way, this is not gender exclusive—if you will say something on Facebook that you won't say to their face, that is compartmentalizing, because you are saying in this environment it is ok, but I would never do it face-to-face. That is what we call talking behind somebody's back. Don't talk behind their back something you wouldn't talk to their face.

So compartmentalizing our life is when we live a contradictory life or we would do things in one environment that we would never do in another environment. That is compartmentalizing.

The second thing we tend to do or we accidentally fall into the trap of is what I call categorizing. We categorize our life by who we are or what we do. Let me give you

some examples. If I were to list for you the categories of my life I would say: I am a husband. I am a dad. I am a child. I am an employer. I am a resident of a specific county. I live in a specific neighborhood. There are so many different categories that I can categorize my life by. But first and foremost, the category that should be the key is that I am a saved, born again believer in Jesus Christ. That category, the fact that I realize that I am a sinner in need of saving; that categorization ought to trump all other categories.

Now I know you may be thinking to yourself, well, time out. This whole marriage thing that we are supposed to make work. Aren't we supposed to put our spouse first? Yes, but under Jesus. See, Jesus said in Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."⁴

And what happens when we begin to miscategorize our life we fall into a horrible trap. I want to share with you a story that happened over 20 years ago, but is still so fresh in my mind.

I grew up as a young child in church. I was not blessed to have an Awana program like we have here where, you know, the students get together and they do the Bible verses and then come together and play and have all kinds of fun. I grew up—and some of you may not be familiar with what I am going to talk about—but I got a couple of good amens in the first service. I grew up a Royal Ambassador. Hey, hey. I've got some Royal Ambassadors. Ok. On the other side, do we have any Girls in Action here? There we go, got a few.

If you are going, "What on earth is that?" Years ago—and I am dating myself—and it is still in existence today, there was a discipleship ministry in churches, Royal Ambassadors for the guys and Girls in Action for the girls. Royal Ambassadors was kind of like Boy Scouts with the Bible, so to speak. What it really did made church so much fun, because, you know, you tie knots. You go on camping trips, do sports. But yet at the same time I was a Lad 1, Lad 2, Lad 3, Page, Squire and Knight. And do you know what made my RA experience, Royal Ambassador experience, so much fun? Honestly it was the leaders I had. I thought these guys were so cool, but I thought they were so old. The funny thing is they are my age now. But looking back at the time I thought, man, these guys are like ancient, but they were my age now. That is why they were so much fun, to be honest with you. That being said, they made church so much fun and so enjoyable.

When I was in high school I had finished the RA program. I had grown up to become a part of the student ministry. Growing up in the Dallas-Forth Worth area, you know, there are times when you don't have a lot of money and you want to have a good time and so the guys go out. One of the things we found to be a good cheap form of entertainment was going to Dallas Maverick games, because they stunk back then and they couldn't give tickets away. You could go in and buy the cheapest ticket they had and get in the nosebleed section, by half time you were sitting in first class seats because nobody else was there. We had gone to a Mavericks game one night, and when they changed quarters we went out into the big hallways and we were looking for food. And there in the

⁴ Matthew 6:33.

distance, about 40 feet away I saw a group of guys. These were my RA leaders from when I was a kid just a few years back. They were at the Maverick game. I am thinking to myself, how cool. These guys come to Maverick games. You know, these are awesome guys.

When we got closer, about 10 or 12 feet away the look in their eyes turned into absolute horror, for when our eyes met his chest every one of those guys had a big old 32-ounce beer in their hand.

And I have got a question for you. You think any of those guys would ever take that to RAs? Never. But you know what happened is they started categorizing that being out with the guys trumps being an RA leader. Or hanging out at a ball game trumps what I do with those guys every week as I pour my life into theirs. And what happens is we don't mean to. We don't mean to categorize, but we don't realize what can happen when we start saying, "Well, that is this life and that is my other life."

But last, but not least, the way we kind of fall into Pharisaism is we customize our life. You know, we live in a world today of custom everything. You can customize your car. You can customize your house. I want you to know, I thank the Lord of custom clothes. You ought to see how much fabric they have to cut off the bottom of my pant when I go buy a pair. It is incredible. I can, you know, take them and make shorts for people. I mean, custom stuff is good, all right? The problem is when we apply customization to Christianity. What we say is, "I have my version of Christianity. You have your version." I say everything is ok but this. You say everything is ok, but that. And what ends up happening is we have our own flavor. You have your flavor and pretty soon there is no consistency whatsoever, because not only is our life different in one location than the next, but none of our lives is consistent compared to each others. And that is why an unbelieving world so easily finds Christianity so unbelievable.

So we conclude with this. As Jesus shared this message in Matthew 23, what can we do? How can we change our lives and how do we respond to the fact that every one of us at some level in some way, whether intentionally or not, finds ourselves drifting into a life that is contradictory?

The first instruction or the first piece of advice I want to give you is this; Have your life be Christ-like. What that means is categorizing your life that as a born-again believer in Jesus Christ, wherever you are, whoever you are with, your relationship to Jesus is more important than your relationship to anybody or anything else. If that is your desire and that is your goal, it will literally solve 95 percent of all the pharisaical issues in your life. Number one, Christ-likeness.

Number two, consistent living. That means that whatever you do in here on Sunday, you ought to do on Monday, and vice versa. If you are in church, if you are on the ball field if you are at school, if you are at home, our life ought to imitate or look the same everywhere we go.

Do you know what the world is craving right now? Authenticity. The world is craving for people who go to church on Sunday to act the same when they show up in school on Monday or go to work. The world is craving an authenticity. It is craving a consistency. And for those of you who don't know me well, I know I am a little bit goofy up here on the platform. Trust me, I am just as goofy off the platform. I am who I am. Whether you like it or not, this is who I am. And the world is craving an authentic, consistent life.

And here is the last thing. This sums it all up. Not only should we be Christ-like, not only should we live consistently, but we ought to live a life with a great concern for others; meaning that how we live on Monday, what we say on Monday, what we do with social media, what we don't, that we actually care how others see, perceive and respond.

And I want to give you some of the wisdom of the ages. Please understand. The illustration that I am about to use involves a specific behavior. But don't limit it to just this behavior. I am going to unpack it for a moment. This advice, this wisdom of the ages comes from my own mom. This was something she shared with me as a young child and growing up in my teenage years and now as an adult I realize the wisdom of what she said. Now some of you are going to get upset with what she said, but just hold on and let me unpack it. Here is what she said. She said, "Jeff, you know, drinking a beer is not going to send you to hell, but it might help send somebody else."

Going to that location and participating in that activity may not send you to hell, but it may help send somebody else. Saying what you said to somebody the way you said it may not send you to hell, but it might help send somebody else.

And what she was communicating to me in a very clear way that Jesus was trying to communicate when he said, "Do you realize your proselytes are twice the children of hell as you are," is that you personally, you might have come to a point in your life where you have admitted you were a sinner and asked Jesus to save you, but we live in a lost and dying world that is craving to see Jesus in you. And our behavior and our mannerisms and our words, if they will reflect out there what we claim to believe in here, it will be like the light to a bug. It will be absolutely irresistible.

You know, just this weekend my kids and I watched a great modern day—as far as I am concerned—a classic; "Wreck It Ralph." Have you all watched it yet? Hey, if you are a child of the 80s it is your movie. I mean it is all about 80s video games. It is good stuff. I don't want to spoil the conclusion, but I am about to, so if you have never seen it and you don't want it to be spoiled, cover your ears right now. The enemy in the movie, who is a bug is eliminated when the protagonist, Ralph creates a light so bright he cannot resist it. And if our lives at home and at school and at work and even, yes, here on this campus are so bright for Jesus Christ, then the world will not be able to resist us. What they resist is when we live our life here one way and there another way.