

34. Woe to the facades

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Several years ago, my family visited the Universal Studio in CA. In the course of the tram tour, they showed us the city that looked real, but there was nothing inside of those buildings. They are known as facades. They were movie sets to make people to think that it was some place in America or in the world, yet the truth was known it was right smack dab in the middle of Southern California.

We can put hypocrisy as facade in Christianity.

Hypocrisy is hideous. What cancer is to the body, hypocrisy is to the church. It is a killing agent. Unfortunately, hypocrisy is also addictive. And even though Jesus reserved His most severe words of condemnation for the hypocrite, we still seem to prefer that lifestyle to truth and authenticity.

Jesus showed His compassion to garden variety sinners and spoke to them about the truth and salvation. He wanted to reach out to them with love and mercy. But when it comes to the Pharisees and scribes, He saw them right through their religious phony baloney, sickeningly pious mumbo-jumbo, and double minded "Say-one-thing-but-mean-something-else" jive.

This was our Lord's last public message. It is a stern denunciation of false religion that paraded under the guise of truth. There were about 6,000 Pharisees in that day. We should remind ourselves that not all of the Pharisees were hypocrites. The name "Pharisees" came from a word that means "to separate" for the Lord their God. But for the most part, the Pharisees used their religion to promote themselves and their material gain. No wonder Jesus denounced them.

Today, we see Jesus holding no punches back. He just let them have.

A. DO WHAT THEY SAY, NOT WHAT THEY DO

Matt 23:1-4 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

Jesus says respect is due to the scribes and Pharisees - not because of their conduct, but because they sit in Moses' seat. They hold an office of authority, ordained by God.

The first accusation against these religious leaders could apply to many religious leaders today. Many still make Christianity a set of burdensome rules to follow. Some of the Christian denominations demand that you have to speak in tongue or baptize in a certain way by their denominations to be truly saved. The Seventh Day Adventist demands that you cannot worship God on Sunday, because it is not Sabbath, yet they don't have a problem eating ham sandwiches and driving more than a half mile on Saturday.

B. EXPOSING THE FLAWS OF THE PHARISEES

Matt 23:5-12 But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

To them, success meant recognition by men and praise from men. They were not concerned about the approval of God. They used their religion to attract attention, not to glorify God.

The Pharisees also thought that position was a mark of greatness, so they sought the best seats in the synagogue. They also thought that titles of honor were a mark of greatness. Today many religious leaders covet honorary doctor's degrees. Some preachers love to be called "Reverend." In my opinion, there is not one person on the face of the earth who deserves to be called Reverend. Only God is reverend, no one else.

God has placed spiritual leaders in the church, but they must not replace God in our lives. A true spiritual leader directs his people into freedom and a closer fellowship with Christ, not into bondage to his ideas and ways.

C. THE EIGHT WOES

Jesus was angry at their sins, and what those sins were doing to the people. But His attitude was one of painful sorrow that the Pharisees were blinded to God's truth and to their own sins.

The best way to understand with these eight "woes" is to contrast them with the eight beatitudes found in Matthew 5:1-12. In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord described true righteousness. Here He described a false righteousness.

1) Shutting up the kingdom - Entering the kingdom

Matt 23:13 But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

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

The poor in spirit enter the kingdom, but the proud in spirit like these Pharisees keep themselves out and even keep others out.

Why was Jesus so mad at the scribes and Pharisees? It is bad enough for a person to choose to go to hell by his own choice, but it is a more damnable thing for a person to drag others to hell with them by giving them a wrong Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Gal 6:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

Many of you know Robert Schuller, the pastor of the Crystal Cathedral. He said, "In other words, Jesus had an ego. He said, 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto

me.' Wow, what an ego trip He was on." Schuller was giving the idea that Jesus had an ego problem. Jesus doesn't have an ego problem since He is the Owner of the universe, Robert Schuller does. And he is the one who is making the people to stray away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

2) Destroyers condemned - Mourners comforted

Matt 23:14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

The Pharisees stole widows' houses in the name of good business and "stewardship", and made long prayers for the sake of big donations.

They used their religion as a "cloak of covetousness." We see this exact pattern in the ministries of some of the crooked televangelists:

Fred Price (televangelist): "The Bible says that He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. That's the reason why I drive a Rolls Royce. I'm following Jesus' steps."

Creflo Dollar (televangelist): "I'm telling you, Jesus wasn't poor, and He didn't wear no rags.... Jesus didn't have no rags on. He wore designer clothes, honey!"

These two televangelists have Rolls Royces, private Lear jets and million dollar homes. But on TV, they beg for money from the viewers. They say, "Plant the financial seeds of your faith in this ministry. God will return your faith seeds in a hundredfold."

If they have that much faith, why don't they send their money to little old ladies' homes and get a hundredfold from God? While these old ladies send their social security checks to their ministries, they wear two thousand dollar custom tailored suits and Italian alligator shoes and driving a Rolls Royce.

3) Proud send souls to hell - Meek inherit the earth

Matt 23:15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

The Pharisees were out to win others to their legalistic system. Zeal in evangelism does not prove that a person is right with God. They make proselytes (converts), but their converts cannot learn anything good from their mentors.

The convert usually shows more zeal than his mentor, and this "double devotion" only produces double condemnation. How tragic that people can think they are going to heaven, when actually they are going to hell!

The Jewish religious leaders were similar to Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses today. They were courageous and energetic messengers, but with a false message.

4) Greedy for gain - Hungering for holiness

Matt 23:16-22 Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the

temple that sanctifies the gold? And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.' Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

The Pharisees were not hungering for righteousness, integrity, truth and simplicity. They worked out a "religious system" that permitted them to rob God and others and still maintain their reputations.

5) Rejecting mercy - Obtaining mercy

Matt 23:23-24 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

The Pharisees majored on minors. They had rules for every minute area of life, while at the same time they forgot about the important things. It is usually the case that legalists are sticklers for details, but blind to great principles. These Pharisees thought nothing of condemning innocent Jesus, yet they were afraid to enter Pilate's judgment hall, because they might be defiled.

6) Extortion in heart - Pure in heart

Matt 23:25-26 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

The Pharisees were careful to keep the outside very clean, because that was the part that men would see and they wanted the praise of men. But God sees the heart. When God looked within, He saw "full of extortion and self-indulgence".

7) Lawlessness in heart - Peace in heart

Matt 23:27-28 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

Jewish people were careful not to touch dead bodies or anything relating to the dead, because this would make them ceremonially unclean. They would whitewash the tombs, so nobody accidentally get defiled, and this was done especially at Passover season. What a graphic picture of the hypocrite: white on the outside, but filled with defilement and death on the inside!

D.L. Moody used to say, "If I take care of my character, my reputation will take care of itself." The Pharisees lived for reputation, not character.

8) Persecuting the righteous - Being persecuted for righteousness

Matt 23:29-35 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Matthew 5:10-12 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Pharisees and their kind are guilty of all the righteous blood shed in the name of "religion." The first martyr recorded in Old Testament Scripture was Abel in Gen. 4, and the last one recorded was the Prophet Zechariah in 2 Chron. 24:20–22.

Jesus has no plan to make friends with the Jewish religious leaders. Normally, it really doesn't work well in trying to make friends, when we call them names.

Matt 23:36-39 Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

D. APPLICATIONS

1) True spirituality is not something we can display outside as we want. It only shows during the time of difficulty from inside of our hearts.

Instead of trying to show off our spiritual maturity to others, let's ask God to deepen our walk with Him. When you pray this, expect trials coming to your way. That is how God trains us, strengthens us and grows us.

2) We must see our own sins in the way God sees.

If we can see our own sins in the way He sees, it would make us to tremble at our sins. Why is it necessary to see our sins from God's point of view? Because we need to please our Father in heaven who is holy and righteous.

3) We must remember that God despises Hypocrisy.

The chapter 23 can be summed up in one word "Hypocrisy." There is nothing make non-Christians to despise Christianity than hypocrites in the church, in the workplace and at home.

Brothers and sisters, when you go to work or market place, or restaurant, how do you act? Can they tell that you are Christians by your bumper stickers, Christian

paraphernalias or by your actions? Do you cuss when you are mad at someone or something? Do you laugh and enjoy when dirty jokes were told? Or do you walk away before they start those dirty jokes? Are you light and salt of this world or you just want to be a part of this world?

You claim that you are Christians in the church. Your identification with Jesus does not stop at the church door as soon as you walk out the door. You must carry it on all the time.

Let's not be hypocrites for the sake of our Lord Jesus.