CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Matthew Chapter 23 — Woes Against Hypocrisy and the Lament for Jerusalem

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Matthew Chapter 22 ended with silence.

No one could answer Jesus.

And from that day on, no one dared to ask Him any more questions.

Now in Matthew Chapter 23, Jesus speaks.

He speaks to the crowds.

He speaks to His disciples.

And He speaks directly to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees.

This is the last public teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew.

It takes place in the temple courts during the last week before His death.

Jesus begins with a warning.

The religious leaders teach God's law.

But they do not live it.

They place heavy loads on others.

They do everything to be seen.

They love honor, titles, and the best seats.

Jesus tells His followers to be different.

“The greatest among you will be your servant.”

Then Jesus speaks seven times with the word **“Woe.”**

Each woe is a solemn warning.

Each one exposes a different kind of religious hypocrisy.

They shut the door of the kingdom.

They twist the meaning of oaths.

They tithe their spices but neglect justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

They clean the outside of the cup but leave the inside filthy.

They are like whitewashed tombs.

They honor dead prophets while planning to kill the living Messiah.

But the chapter does not end in anger.

It ends in tears.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”

These words show the heart of Jesus.

His warnings are strong because His love is strong.

It is important to read this chapter carefully.

Jesus is not condemning the Jewish people as a whole.

Jesus Himself was Jewish.

So were His disciples and the crowds who listened to Him gladly.

His words are aimed at hypocritical religious leaders who were leading people away from God.

And His words are a warning to every religious person in every age — including us.

Matthew 23 therefore shows two great truths:

God hates religious hypocrisy because it hides a corrupt heart behind a holy appearance.

And:

Even in judgment, the heart of Jesus longs to gather people to Himself.

The central truth of Matthew 23 is:

Jesus warns against religion that is outward, proud, and empty, calls His followers to humble service and true righteousness from the heart, and weeps over those who refuse His love.

I. JESUS SPEAKS TO THE CROWDS

Matthew 23:1 — To the Crowds and to His Disciples

“Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples,”

Then Jesus spoke.

The religious leaders had run out of questions.

Now Jesus had something to say to everyone.

To the crowds.

The ordinary people needed to know whom to follow.

And to His disciples.

His followers needed to learn what kind of leaders they must become.

Soon they would lead the church.

They must not lead like the Pharisees.

Cross References

Matthew 5:1

> When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on a hill and sat down. His followers came to Him.

Mark 12:37

> The large crowd enjoyed listening to Jesus.

Luke 20:45

> While all the people were listening, Jesus said to His followers,

Spiritual Principle

Jesus warns His people so they will not follow the wrong example.

II. MOSES' SEAT

Matthew 23:2 — Teachers of the Law

“saying: ‘The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.’”

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees.

The teachers of the law were experts who studied and explained the Scriptures.

Many of them were Pharisees.

The Pharisees were a group known for strict obedience to the law and to their traditions.

Sit in Moses' seat.

To sit in Moses' seat meant to have the role of teaching God's law to the people.

In the synagogues, teachers sat down to teach.

Moses had received God's law at Mount Sinai.

These men claimed to pass that law on to the people.

Cross References

Nehemiah 8:1

> All the people gathered together in the open area in front of the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the teacher of the law to bring out the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel.

Deuteronomy 17:10

> You must do what they tell you at the place the LORD will choose. Be careful to do everything they teach you.

Malachi 2:7

> A priest should guard knowledge. People should look to him to learn God's teaching, because he is the messenger of the LORD who commands armies.

Spiritual Principle

Teaching God's Word is a great responsibility.

III. THEY DO NOT PRACTICE WHAT THEY PREACH

Matthew 23:3 — Do What They Tell You

“So you must be careful to do what they tell you, but do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.”

Do what they tell you.

When they read and taught the law of Moses, the people should obey it.

God's Word was still God's Word, even when it came from an imperfect teacher.

Jesus did not mean that every human tradition they taught must be obeyed.

In Matthew 15, He had already rejected traditions that cancel God's commands.

But do not do what they do.

Their teaching was better than their lives.

For they do not practice what they preach.

This is the heart of hypocrisy.

A hypocrite says one thing and does another.

Cross References

Romans 2:21

> You teach others, so why don't you teach yourself? You tell people not to steal, but do you steal?

Titus 1:16

> They say they know God, but the things they do show they reject Him. They are hateful and disobedient and not fit to do anything good.

Ezekiel 33:31

> My people come to you as they usually do and sit in front of you to hear your words. But they do not do what you say. With their mouths they say they love Me, but their hearts are greedy for selfish gain.

Spiritual Principle

Our lives must match the truth we teach.

Spiritual Warning

It is possible to know the Bible well and still not obey it.

IV. HEAVY LOADS

Matthew 23:4 — Not Willing to Lift a Finger

“They tie up heavy, burdensome loads and put them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”

They tie up heavy, burdensome loads.

The Pharisees added many rules to God's law.

They told people exactly how to keep the Sabbath, how to wash, how to tithe, and much more.

Religion became a crushing weight.

And put them on people's shoulders.

Ordinary people felt they could never measure up.

But they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

They gave no help.

They showed no compassion.

How different this is from Jesus.

Jesus said, **“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”**

Cross References

Luke 11:46

> Jesus said, “How terrible for you experts in the law! You load people down with heavy burdens they can hardly carry, but you will not lift one finger to help them.”

Acts 15:10

> So why are you now testing God by putting a heavy load on the necks of the believers? Neither our ancestors nor we have been able to carry it.

Isaiah 10:27

> On that day the heavy load will be taken off your shoulders, and the yoke will be lifted from your neck.

Spiritual Principle

False religion adds burdens; Jesus lifts them.

V. DONE FOR PEOPLE TO SEE

Matthew 23:5 — Wide Phylacteries and Long Tassels

“Everything they do is done for people to see: they make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long.”

Everything they do is done for people to see.

Their religion was a performance.

They wanted an audience.

Phylacteries were small leather boxes holding verses of Scripture.

Jewish men tied them on the forehead and arm during prayer.

This came from God's command to keep His words as a sign on their hands and foreheads.

They make their phylacteries wide.

Bigger boxes made them look more devoted.

The tassels on their garments long.

God had commanded tassels on clothing to remind Israel of His commands.

The Gospels suggest that Jesus Himself wore them.

But the Pharisees made theirs longer to look more holy.

The problem was not the phylacteries or the tassels.

The problem was the heart that wanted to be noticed.

Cross References

Numbers 15:38

> Tell the Israelites: For all time to come, you must sew tassels on the corners of your clothes, with a blue cord on each tassel.

Deuteronomy 6:8

> Tie them on your hands as a sign, and wear them on your foreheads to remind you.

Matthew 6:1

> Be careful not to do your good deeds in front of people just so they will see you. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Spiritual Principle

God looks for devotion, not display.

VI. THE PLACE OF HONOR

Matthew 23:6 — The Most Important Seats

“They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues.”

They love the place of honor at banquets.

At a feast, the most important guests sat closest to the host.

And the most important seats in the synagogues.

In the synagogue, the most important seats faced the people.

Everyone could see who sat there.

The key word is **love.**

They loved being important.

They loved being seen as better than others.

Cross References

Luke 14:7

> Jesus noticed how the guests were choosing the best seats at the table. So He told them a story.

Mark 12:39

> They love the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts.

Proverbs 25:6

> Do not try to make yourself look important in front of the king. Do not take a place among great people.

Spiritual Principle

A heart that loves honor cannot fully love God.

VII. GREETINGS AND TITLES

Matthew 23:7 — Called ‘Rabbi’

“They love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.”

They love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces.

The marketplace was a busy public place.

They loved it when people bowed or greeted them with honor where everyone could see.

And to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.

Rabbi means **“my teacher”** or **“my great one.”**

It was a title of great respect.

They loved the title more than they loved the people they were supposed to teach.

Cross References

Mark 12:38

> As Jesus taught, He said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in long robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces.”

Luke 11:43

> How terrible for you Pharisees! You love the most important seats in the synagogues and being greeted with respect in the marketplaces.

James 2:3

> Suppose you pay special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here is a good seat for you,” but you say to the poor man, “Stand over there,” or “Sit on the floor by my feet.”

Spiritual Principle

Titles mean nothing to God if the heart is proud.

VIII. ONE TEACHER

Matthew 23:8 — You Are All Brothers and Sisters

“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters.”

But you.

Jesus now turns to His disciples.

They must be different.

You are not to be called ‘Rabbi.’

They must not seek titles that lift them above others.

For you have one Teacher.

That Teacher is Christ.

Every human teacher is only a student pointing others to the true Teacher.

And you are all brothers and sisters.

In God's family, no one stands above the others.

We are all equal before God.

We all need His grace.

Cross References

John 13:13

> You call Me “Teacher” and “Lord,” and you are right, because that is what I am.

1 Corinthians 8:6

> For us there is only one God, the Father. All things came from Him, and we live for Him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ. All things came through Him, and we live through Him.

John 3:2

> Nicodemus came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know You are a teacher who has come from God. No one could do the signs You are doing unless God were with him.”

Spiritual Principle

In Christ's family, there is one Teacher and many brothers and sisters.

IX. ONE FATHER

Matthew 23:9 — He Is in Heaven

“Do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and He is in heaven.”

Do not call anyone on earth ‘father.’

The Jewish people honored great teachers of the past by calling them **“father.”**

It meant the person was a source of spiritual life and authority.

For you have one Father, and He is in heaven.

God alone is the source of spiritual life.

His Word alone has final authority.

Christians have understood this verse in different ways.

Many believers understand Jesus to be forbidding religious titles that give a human being the honor and authority that belong only to God.

In this view, the word itself is not wrong — Paul even calls himself a **father** to the Corinthians — but the spirit of pride and dependence on a man is wrong.

Some believers take the words more literally and avoid using **“father”** as a religious title at all.

Other traditions use the title for spiritual leaders, seeing it as an expression of care for God's family, not a claim to replace God.

All agree on Jesus' main point:

No human leader may take God's place.

Cross References

Malachi 2:10

> Don't we all have one Father? Didn't one God create us? Then why do we break faith with one another?

Ephesians 4:6

> There is one God and Father of all. He is over all, through all, and in all.

1 Corinthians 4:15

> You may have ten thousand teachers in Christ, but you do not have many fathers. I became your father in Christ Jesus through the good news.

Spiritual Principle

No human being can take the place of our Father in heaven.

X. ONE MASTER

Matthew 23:10 — The Christ

“Nor are you to be called ‘masters,’ for you have one Master, the Christ.”

Nor are you to be called ‘masters.’

The word means a guide or instructor.

It refers to someone who leads others in the right way.

For you have one Master, the Christ.

Jesus calls Himself **the Christ** — the promised Messiah.

He is the only true Guide.

In Matthew 23:8–10 Jesus names three titles:

- Rabbi — Teacher
- Father
- Master

And He points to three persons:

- One Teacher — Christ

- One Father — in heaven
- One Master — the Christ

Every title of spiritual honor points upward to God.

Cross References

Colossians 4:1

> Masters, give your slaves what is right and fair. Remember that you also have a Master in heaven.

James 3:1

> My brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers. You know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Malachi 1:6

> A son honors his father, and a servant honors his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due Me? If I am a master, where is the respect due Me? says the LORD who commands armies.

Spiritual Principle

Christ alone is the Master of His people.

XI. THE GREATEST IS A SERVANT

Matthew 23:11 — Your Servant

“The greatest among you will be your servant.”

The greatest among you.

The disciples had argued about who was the greatest.

Jesus had answered this before.

Now He says it again.

Will be your servant.

In God's kingdom, greatness is measured by service.

The Pharisees wanted to be served.

Jesus came to serve.

Just days later, He would wash His disciples' feet.

And then He would give His life on the cross.

Cross References

Matthew 20:27

> Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave.

Mark 9:35

> Jesus sat down and called the twelve. He said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be last of all and the servant of all.”

John 13:14

> I am your Lord and Teacher, and I have washed your feet. So you also should wash one another's feet.

Spiritual Principle

True greatness is found in humble service.

XII. HUMBLED AND EXALTED

Matthew 23:12 — God Turns Things Upside Down

“For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Those who exalt themselves.

These are people who lift themselves up.

They seek honor.

They want to be first.

Will be humbled.

God will bring them down.

And those who humble themselves.

These are people who bow low before God and serve others.

Will be exalted.

God Himself will lift them up.

This is one of the great laws of God's kingdom.

Jesus Himself is the greatest example.

He humbled Himself to death on a cross.

So God exalted Him to the highest place.

Cross References

Luke 14:11

> All who make themselves important will be made humble, and those who make themselves humble will be made important.

Proverbs 29:23

> Pride will bring a person down, but a humble spirit will gain honor.

James 4:10

> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Spiritual Principle

The way up in God's kingdom is down.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

If you lift yourself up, God will bring you down; if you bow down, God will lift you up.

XIII. THE FIRST WOE — SHUTTING THE DOOR

Matthew 23:13 — You Shut the Door

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”

Woe to you.

Woe is a cry of sorrow and a warning of judgment.

It is the opposite of **blessed.**

In Matthew 5, Jesus began His teaching with blessings.

Now, near the end, He speaks woes.

You hypocrites!

A **hypocrite** was an actor who wore a mask on stage.

They were acting a part.

Their outward life did not match their inner life.

You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces.

They should have opened the door to God.

Instead, they slammed it shut.

They rejected Jesus and turned others away from Him.

You yourselves do not enter.

They refused to come to Jesus.

Nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

They threatened anyone who believed in Him.

Cross References

Luke 11:52

> How terrible for you experts in the law! You have taken away the key that opens the door to knowledge. You yourselves did not go in, and you stopped those who were trying to go in.

John 9:22

> His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. The leaders had already agreed that anyone who said Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue.

Acts 4:18

> Then they called the apostles in again and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

Religious leaders should open the door to Christ, not close it.

Spiritual Warning

The worst thing a person can do is not only refuse Christ, but keep others from Him.

XIV. DEVOURING WIDOWS' HOUSES

Matthew 23:14 — Long Prayers for a Show

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You devour widows' houses and for a show make long prayers. Therefore you will be punished most severely.”

A Note on This Verse

Matthew 23:14 does not appear in the oldest Greek manuscripts of Matthew.

For this reason, many modern Bibles place it in a footnote.

Other Bibles, including those based on later manuscripts, keep it in the text.

The same words are found without question in **Mark 12:40** and **Luke 20:47.**

So what this verse teaches is true Scripture, even if it was first written by Mark and Luke rather than Matthew.

You devour widows' houses.

Widows were among the most helpless people in that society.

God had commanded special care for them.

But these leaders took advantage of them.

They may have taken their money or property through unfair dealings.

And for a show make long prayers.

They covered their greed with religious words.

Therefore you will be punished most severely.

The more a person knows, the greater the judgment for abusing that knowledge.

Cross References

Mark 12:40

> They take widows' houses away from them, and they make long prayers to show off. These men will be punished more severely.

Luke 20:47

> They take away widows' homes and make long prayers so people will see them. They will be punished all the more.

Isaiah 10:2

> They keep the poor from getting justice and take away the rights of the needy among My people. They take from widows and rob orphans.

Spiritual Principle

God defends the helpless and judges those who use religion to take advantage of them.

XV. THE SECOND WOE — FALSE CONVERTS

Matthew 23:15 — Twice as Much a Child of Hell

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.”

You travel over land and sea to win a single convert.

They worked hard to bring people into their way of religion.

Their zeal looked admirable.

And when you have succeeded.

The problem was not their effort.

The problem was what they turned people into.

You make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

A **child of hell** means someone whose life belongs to hell.

They brought people into rules and pride, not into a relationship with God.

New converts are often more zealous than their teachers.

So they became even more proud and legalistic than the ones who taught them.

Cross References

Galatians 4:17

> Those people are eager to win you over, but not for good. They want to cut you off from us so you will be eager to follow them.

Acts 13:10

> Paul said, “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of lies and tricks. Will you never stop twisting the straight ways of the Lord?”

Acts 15:1

> Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and began teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised as Moses taught, you cannot be saved.”

Spiritual Principle

Zeal without truth leads people in the wrong direction.

XVI. THE THIRD WOE — BLIND GUIDES

Matthew 23:16 — Swearing by the Temple

“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.’”

Woe to you, blind guides!

A guide is supposed to see the way.

But these guides were blind.

They led others into the ditch.

If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing.

People made promises by swearing an oath.

The Pharisees made rules about which oaths counted and which did not.

But anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.

They created loopholes.

A person could make a promise that sounded serious, then break it on a technicality.

This was a clever way to lie.

Cross References

Matthew 15:14

> Leave them alone. They are blind guides. If a blind person leads another blind person, both will fall into a pit.

Exodus 20:7

> You must not misuse the name of the LORD your God. The LORD will not let anyone go unpunished who misuses His name.

Leviticus 19:12

> Do not make a false promise using My name. That would make the name of your God unholy. I am the LORD.

Spiritual Principle

God sees through every loophole we make to avoid keeping our word.

XVII. WHICH IS GREATER?

Matthew 23:17 — The Gold or the Temple

“You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?”

You blind fools!

Their reasoning made no sense.

Which is greater: the gold, or the temple?

They valued the gold more.

That showed what they really loved.

The temple that makes the gold sacred.

The gold was only holy because it belonged to God's temple.

The temple was holy because God's presence was there.

They had turned things upside down.

Cross References

Exodus 30:29

> Set them apart as holy, and they will be most holy. Whatever touches them will become holy.

Haggai 2:8

> The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, says the LORD who commands armies.

1 Kings 9:3

> The LORD said to him: “I have heard your prayer. I have made this temple you built holy. I have put My name there forever. My eyes and My heart will always be there.”

Spiritual Principle

When we love money more than God, our thinking becomes twisted.

XVIII. SWEARING BY THE ALTAR

Matthew 23:18 — The Gift on the Altar

“You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’”

If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing.

The altar was where sacrifices were offered to God.

But anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound.

Again, they made the gift more important than the altar.

Again, they created a way to escape their promises.

Cross References

Exodus 29:37

> For seven days make the altar ready and set it apart as holy. Then the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will become holy.

Matthew 5:24

> Leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and make peace with your brother or sister. Then come back and offer your gift.

Numbers 18:9

> Part of the most holy offerings that are not burned up will belong to you. This includes all the gifts the people bring to Me.

Spiritual Principle

Man-made rules can hide dishonest hearts.

XIX. THE ALTAR MAKES THE GIFT SACRED

Matthew 23:19 — Which Is Greater?

“You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?”

Which is greater?

Jesus asks the same kind of question again.

The altar that makes the gift sacred.

A gift became holy when it was placed on God's altar.

The altar was set apart for God.

The gift was holy because of the altar, not the other way around.

They focused on the things they could see and count.

They forgot the God to whom everything belonged.

Cross References

Leviticus 8:11

> He sprinkled some of the oil on the altar seven times. He poured oil on the altar and all its tools to make them holy.

Ezekiel 43:26

> For seven days they must make the altar pure and clean. That is how they will set it apart for God.

1 Kings 8:64

> On that same day the king set apart the middle of the courtyard in front of the LORD's temple, because the bronze altar was too small to hold all the offerings.

Spiritual Principle

What we give is holy only because of the God to whom we give it.

XX. EVERYTHING ON IT

Matthew 23:20 — By the Altar and Everything on It

“Therefore anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.”

Anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.

Jesus removes the loophole.

Every oath is connected to God.

You cannot separate the altar from the gifts.

You cannot separate your promise from God.

Earlier, Jesus taught:

“Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’”

A follower of Jesus does not need special words to be honest.

His word should always be true.

Cross References

Matthew 5:34

> But I tell you, do not make any promise with an oath at all. Do not swear by heaven, because it is God's throne.

James 5:12

> Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so you will not be judged.

Zechariah 5:4

> The LORD who commands armies says, “I will send this curse out. It will enter the house of the thief and the house of anyone who swears falsely by My name.”

Spiritual Principle

Every promise we make is made in the presence of God.

XXI. THE ONE WHO DWELLS IN IT

Matthew 23:21 — Swearing by the Temple

“And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the One who dwells in it.”

Anyone who swears by the temple.

The temple was not just a building.

Swears by it and by the One who dwells in it.

The temple was holy because God chose to live there among His people.

To swear by the temple was to swear by God Himself.

The Pharisees thought they could leave God out of their promises.

Jesus shows them they cannot.

Cross References

1 Kings 8:13

> I have built a wonderful temple for You, a place for You to live forever.

Psalm 26:8

> LORD, I love the house where You live, the place where Your glory dwells.

Ezekiel 43:7

> He said to me: “Son of man, this is the place of My throne. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever.”

Spiritual Principle

We can never leave God out of our words.

XXII. GOD'S THRONE

Matthew 23:22 — The One Who Sits on It

“And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the One who sits on it.”

Anyone who swears by heaven.

Some people swore by heaven, thinking it was safer than using God's name.

Swears by God's throne.

Heaven is the throne of God.

And by the One who sits on it.

There is no escaping God.

Every oath, every promise, every word is spoken before the King of heaven.

This third woe teaches a simple truth:

Honesty is not about the words we use, but about the God before whom we speak.

Cross References

Isaiah 66:1

> This is what the LORD says: “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. So where is the house you will build for Me?”

Psalm 103:19

> The LORD has set up His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over everything.

Acts 7:49

> Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me? says the Lord.

Spiritual Principle

All of life is lived before the throne of God.

XXIII. THE FOURTH WOE — THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS

Matthew 23:23 — Justice, Mercy, and Faithfulness

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”

You give a tenth of your spices.

The law commanded Israel to give a tenth of their crops to God.

The Pharisees were so careful that they even counted out tiny garden herbs.

Mint, dill, and cumin.

These were small plants used for flavor.

Imagine counting out ten leaves of mint and giving one to God.

But you have neglected the more important matters of the law.

They were careful about little things.

But they ignored the big things.

Justice — treating people fairly and rightly.

Mercy — showing kindness and compassion.

Faithfulness — being loyal and trustworthy toward God and others.

You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

Jesus did not say tithing was wrong.

He said they should do both.

But the heart of God's law is justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Cross References

Micah 6:8

> He has shown you what is good. And what does the LORD want from you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

Luke 11:42

> How terrible for you Pharisees! You give God a tenth of your mint, rue, and every other garden plant. But you ignore justice and the love of God. You should have done these things without leaving the others undone.

Hosea 6:6

> I want mercy, not sacrifice. I want you to know God more than I want burnt offerings.

Spiritual Principle

God cares most about justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do the small things faithfully, but never let the small things crowd out the great things.

XXIV. STRAINING OUT A GNAT

Matthew 23:24 — Swallowing a Camel

“You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.”

You strain out a gnat.

A gnat was the smallest unclean creature.

Some Pharisees poured their drinks through a cloth to make sure they did not swallow one.

But swallow a camel.

A camel was one of the largest unclean animals.

Jesus uses humor to make His point.

They were so careful about tiny details that they missed enormous sins.

They worried about a bug in the cup.

But they swallowed injustice, greed, and pride whole.

Cross References

Leviticus 11:4

> There are some animals that chew the cud or have split hooves, but you must not eat them. The camel chews the cud but does not have split hooves, so it is unclean for you.

Leviticus 11:23

> But all other flying insects that have four legs are to be hated by you as unclean.

Isaiah 5:20

> How terrible for those who call evil good and good evil, who make darkness light and light darkness, who make bitter sweet and sweet bitter.

Spiritual Principle

Being careful about small things does not excuse ignoring great sins.

XXV. THE FIFTH WOE — THE OUTSIDE OF THE CUP

Matthew 23:25 — Full of Greed and Self-Indulgence

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.”

You clean the outside of the cup and dish.

The Pharisees had many rules about washing dishes.

They wanted to be ceremonially clean.

But inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

Jesus is speaking about their hearts.

On the outside they looked pure.

On the inside they were full of greed — taking from others.

And full of **self-indulgence** — living only to please themselves.

Imagine a cup that is shiny on the outside but filthy on the inside.

No one would want to drink from it.

Cross References

Luke 11:39

> The Lord said to him, “You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and evil.”

Mark 7:4

> When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. They also follow many other rules, like washing cups, pitchers, and bronze pots.

Titus 1:15

> To those who are pure, all things are pure. But to those who are corrupt and do not believe, nothing is pure. Their minds and their consciences are corrupted.

Spiritual Principle

A clean outside cannot hide a dirty heart from God.

XXVI. CLEAN THE INSIDE FIRST

Matthew 23:26 — Then the Outside Will Be Clean

“Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside will also be clean.”

First clean the inside.

Jesus gives the right order.

Start with the heart.

And then the outside will also be clean.

When the heart is changed, the life will change.

Good behavior flows out of a clean heart.

But good behavior can never make a dirty heart clean.

Only God can do that.

That is why David prayed, **“Create in me a clean heart, O God.”**

Cross References

Psalm 51:10

> Create a pure heart in me, O God, and give me a new and faithful spirit.

1 Samuel 16:7

> The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outside, but the LORD looks at the heart.

Mark 7:15

> Nothing that goes into a person from outside can make them unclean. It is what comes out of a person that makes them unclean.

Spiritual Principle

God changes us from the inside out.

Key Truth

Religion works from the outside in; God works from the inside out.

XXVII. THE SIXTH WOE — WHITEWASHED TOMBS

Matthew 23:27 — Beautiful on the Outside

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.”

You are like whitewashed tombs.

In Israel, tombs were often painted white with lime.

This warned people so they would not touch a grave by accident.

Touching a grave made a person ceremonially unclean.

This was especially important at Passover, when crowds of pilgrims filled Jerusalem.

Which look beautiful on the outside.

In the sunlight, the white tombs looked clean and bright.

But inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.

Inside was death and decay.

The Pharisees looked holy.

But inside they were spiritually dead.

Cross References

Luke 11:44

> How terrible for you! You are like unmarked graves. People walk over them without knowing it.

Acts 23:3

> Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me by the law, yet you break the law by ordering them to strike me!”

Numbers 19:16

> Anyone out in the open who touches someone killed with a sword, or someone who died naturally, or a human bone, or a grave, will be unclean for seven days.

Spiritual Principle

Outward beauty cannot cover inward death.

XXVIII. HYPOCRISY AND WICKEDNESS

Matthew 23:28 — Righteous on the Outside

“In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

On the outside you appear to people as righteous.

People admired them.

People thought they were the holiest men in Israel.

But on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

Hypocrisy — pretending to be something they were not.

Wickedness — the Greek word means **lawlessness.**

This is shocking.

The men who were most careful about the law were, in their hearts, lawless.

They kept the rules but broke God's law of love.

Cross References

Isaiah 29:13

> The Lord says: “These people come near to Me with their words and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship is based only on rules made by people.”

Galatians 6:3

> If anyone thinks he is important when he is really nothing, he is fooling himself.

Romans 2:28

> A person is not a Jew because of how they look on the outside. And true circumcision is not just something done to the body.

Spiritual Principle

People see the outside; God sees what we really are.

Spiritual Warning

It is possible to fool everyone except God.

XXIX. THE SEVENTH WOE — TOMBS FOR THE PROPHETS

Matthew 23:29 — Decorating the Graves

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.”

You build tombs for the prophets.

They built monuments to honor the prophets of the past.

And decorate the graves of the righteous.

They made the graves beautiful.

It looked like great respect.

But it was easy to honor dead prophets.

Dead prophets could no longer rebuke them.

The real test was how they treated God's messengers who were alive.

And right in front of them stood the greatest Prophet of all.

Cross References

Luke 11:47

> How terrible for you! You build tombs for the prophets, but it was your ancestors who killed them.

Acts 7:52

> Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who told ahead of time about the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him.

Jeremiah 2:30

> I punished your people, but it did no good. They would not accept correction. Your own swords have destroyed your prophets like a hungry lion.

Spiritual Principle

It is easy to honor God's messengers of the past and reject His Word today.

XXX. "WE WOULD NOT HAVE DONE IT"

Matthew 23:30 — If We Had Lived Back Then

“And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’”

If we had lived in the days of our ancestors.

They looked back and judged earlier generations.

We would not have taken part.

They were sure they would have been better.

They would have listened to Isaiah.

They would have protected Jeremiah.

But they were already planning to kill Jesus.

This is a common human weakness.

We are quick to judge others for sins we think we would never commit.

Cross References

2 Chronicles 36:16

> But they made fun of God's messengers, hated His words, and laughed at His prophets. Finally the LORD's anger rose against His people, and nothing could stop it.

Nehemiah 9:26

> But they disobeyed and rebelled against You. They turned their backs on Your law. They killed Your prophets, who had warned them to turn back to You. They did terrible things that insulted You.

Acts 7:51

> You stubborn people! Your hearts and ears are closed to God. You are just like your ancestors. You always fight against the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

Pride says, “I would never do that.” Humility says, “Lord, keep me from it.”

XXXI. TESTIFYING AGAINST THEMSELVES

Matthew 23:31 — Descendants of Those Who Murdered

“So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.”

You testify against yourselves.

Their own words condemned them.

That you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

They called these men **“our ancestors.”**

Jesus says they were not only related by family.

They were related in spirit.

They had the same hard hearts toward God's messengers.

Cross References

1 Thessalonians 2:15

> They killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and they also drove us out. They do not please God, and they are against all people.

Jeremiah 26:23

They brought Uriah out of Egypt and took him to King Jehoiakim. The king had him killed with a sword, and his body was thrown into the burial place of the common people.

1 Kings 19:10

Elijah answered, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God who commands armies. The Israelites have rejected Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

Spiritual Principle

We show whose children we are by how we treat God's Word.

XXXII. FILL UP THE MEASURE

Matthew 23:32 — Finish What Your Ancestors Started

“Go ahead, then, and finish what your ancestors started!”

Go ahead, then.

These are words of solemn warning.

Jesus knew what they were about to do.

Finish what your ancestors started.

Their ancestors had killed the prophets.

Now these leaders would kill the Son of God.

In the Bible, sin is sometimes pictured as filling a cup.

When the cup is full, judgment comes.

God is patient for a long time.

But His patience has an end.

Cross References

Genesis 15:16

In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, because the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

1 Thessalonians 2:16

> They try to stop us from speaking to the Gentiles so they can be saved. In this way they keep adding to their sins until they reach the limit. And now God's anger has finally come upon them.

Daniel 8:23

> In the last part of their rule, when the rebels have become as wicked as they can be, a fierce king will rise up. He will be a master of trickery.

Spiritual Principle

God's patience is great, but it is not endless.

XXXIII. SNAKES AND VIPERS

Matthew 23:33 — How Will You Escape?

“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?”

You snakes! You brood of vipers!

John the Baptist had used these same words for the Pharisees and Sadducees.

A **viper** is a poisonous snake.

Brood means a family of young snakes.

Jesus points back to the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

Their words looked holy, but their hearts carried deadly poison.

How will you escape being condemned to hell?

These are some of the strongest words Jesus ever spoke.

He spoke them not out of hatred, but out of truth and love.

Unless they repented, there would be no escape.

Cross References

Matthew 3:7

> When John saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You snakes! Who warned you to run away from the anger that is coming?”

Luke 3:7

> John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You snakes! Who warned you to run from the coming anger?”

Psalm 58:4

> Their poison is like the poison of a snake. They are like a cobra that closes its ears.

Spiritual Principle

The same Jesus who invites sinners also warns them of judgment.

XXXIV. PROPHETS, WISE MEN, AND TEACHERS

Matthew 23:34 — I Am Sending You

“Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.”

I am sending you.

Jesus speaks with the authority of God.

In the Old Testament, God sent the prophets.

Now Jesus says, **“I am sending.”**

Prophets and wise men and teachers.

These are the apostles and early Christian messengers.

Some of them you will kill and crucify.

Stephen would be stoned.

James would be put to death with a sword.

Others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.

The book of Acts records the apostles being beaten.

Paul, before he became a believer, chased Christians from city to city.

Even after rejecting Jesus, they would still receive more messengers.

God kept giving them chances.

Cross References

Luke 11:49

> That is why God in His wisdom said, “I will send them prophets and apostles. Some of them they will kill, and others they will persecute.”

Acts 5:40

> They called the apostles in and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go.

Acts 22:19

> I said, “Lord, these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to put in prison and beat those who believed in You.”

Spiritual Principle

God keeps sending messengers, even to those who reject Him.

XXXV. ALL THE RIGHTEOUS BLOOD

Matthew 23:35 — From Abel to Zechariah

“And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”

All the righteous blood that has been shed on earth.

This generation would bear the guilt of a long history of rejecting God's messengers.

From the blood of righteous Abel.

Abel was the first person murdered in the Bible.

His story is in Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Bible.

To the blood of Zechariah.

Who Was This Zechariah?

Bible students have understood this name in different ways.

Many believe this is Zechariah son of Jehoiada, who was stoned in the temple courtyard in 2 Chronicles 24.

In the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles is usually placed as the last book.

So **“from Abel to Zechariah”** would mean **“from the first book to the last”** — every martyr in the Old Testament.

In this view, **“son of Berekiah”** may refer to a grandfather or an earlier ancestor, since **“son”** could mean descendant.

Others believe this is the prophet Zechariah, who wrote the book of Zechariah.

He is called **“the son of Berekiah”** in Zechariah 1:1.

The Old Testament does not record how he died, but some Jewish tradition says he was killed.

Still others suggest a different Zechariah known to Jesus' listeners.

Whichever view is correct, the main point is clear:

God remembers every drop of innocent blood.

Between the temple and the altar.

Murder was done in the very place where people came to worship God.

Cross References

Genesis 4:10

> The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood is crying out to Me from the ground.”

2 Chronicles 24:21

> But they plotted against him. By order of the king, they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the LORD's temple.

Luke 11:51

> From the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the temple. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for all of it.

Spiritual Principle

God sees and remembers the suffering of His faithful servants.

XXXVI. THIS GENERATION

Matthew 23:36 — All This Will Come

“Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.”

Truly I tell you.

Jesus speaks with solemn certainty.

All this will come on this generation.

Jesus is speaking to the people of His own day.

About forty years later, in A.D. 70, Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

Many Christians see this as the fulfillment of Jesus' warning.

Jesus will speak more about this in Matthew 24.

This warning does not mean that God blames all Jewish people for all time.

Jesus spoke to a particular generation that rejected Him at a particular moment.

And even then, God's offer of mercy remained open.

On the day of Pentecost, thousands in Jerusalem repented and believed.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 32:5

> They have acted in a corrupt way toward Him. Because of their sin, they are no longer His children. They are a twisted and crooked generation.

Luke 11:50

> So this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world.

Matthew 24:34

> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened.

Spiritual Principle

God's warnings always come true.

XXXVII. JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM

Matthew 23:37 — As a Hen Gathers Her Chicks

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”

Jerusalem, Jerusalem.

The tone changes.

The woes give way to weeping.

Jesus repeats the name, as someone does when grieving over a loved one.

You who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you.

Jerusalem was the city of God.

But it had a history of rejecting God's messengers.

How often I have longed to gather your children together.

Here is the heart of Jesus.

He did not want to judge them.

He wanted to save them.

As a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

When danger comes, a mother hen spreads her wings.

Her chicks run under them for safety.

Jesus would soon give His life to shelter His people from judgment.

And you were not willing.

These are some of the saddest words in the Bible.

God's love was offered.

But it was refused.

Cross References

Luke 13:34

> Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets and stone those God sends to you! How often I have wanted to gather your children together, like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you would not let Me!

Psalm 91:4

> He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find safety. His faithfulness will be your shield and protection.

Jeremiah 26:15

> But know this for sure: if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves, on this city, and on all who live in it. The LORD truly sent me to you to speak all these words for you to hear.

Spiritual Principle

The heart of Jesus longs to gather and protect those who run from Him.

Key Truth

Behind every warning of Jesus is a heart that longs to save.

XXXVIII. YOUR HOUSE IS LEFT DESOLATE

Matthew 23:38 — Left to You

“Look, your house is left to you desolate.”

Your house.

This most likely means the temple, and perhaps the city of Jerusalem as well.

Notice that Jesus does not say **“My Father's house.”**

He says **“your house.”**

Is left to you desolate.

Desolate means empty and abandoned.

In the days of Ezekiel, the glory of the LORD left the temple before it was destroyed.

Now the Lord Himself was about to walk out of the temple.

At the start of Matthew 24, Jesus walks out of the temple.

A temple without God's presence is only an empty building.

Cross References

Jeremiah 22:5

> But if you do not obey these commands, I swear by Myself, says the LORD, that this palace will become a pile of ruins.

Jeremiah 12:7

> I have left My house. I have abandoned My inheritance. I have given the people I love into the hands of their enemies.

Ezekiel 10:18

> Then the glory of the LORD left the doorway of the temple and stopped above the cherubim.

Spiritual Principle

A house of worship without God's presence is empty.

XXXIX. UNTIL YOU SAY "BLESSED"

Matthew 23:39 — He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord

“For I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

You will not see Me again.

This was the end of Jesus' public teaching in the temple.

They would not see Him teaching there again.

Until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’

These words are from Psalm 118.

The crowds had shouted them just days before, when Jesus entered Jerusalem.

Bible students understand this promise in different ways.

Many believe it looks ahead to a future day when the people of Israel will turn to Jesus and welcome Him as Messiah at His return.

Zechariah spoke of a day when they would look on the One they had pierced and mourn.

Paul wrote that a time is coming when **“all Israel will be saved.”**

Others believe it means that when Jesus returns, all people, including those who rejected Him, will have to acknowledge who He is.

Still others see it as an open invitation — whenever anyone welcomes Jesus as the One sent from God, they will see Him.

In every view, the chapter ends not with a closed door, but with hope.

The door of mercy is still open to those who welcome Him.

Cross References

Psalm 118:26

> Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you.

Matthew 21:9

> The crowds going ahead of Him and those following Him shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Zechariah 12:10

> I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and the people of Jerusalem. They will look on Me, the One they have pierced. They will mourn for Him as someone mourns for an only child.

Spiritual Principle

Even after judgment, God holds out the hope of welcoming His Son.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The last word of Jesus to Jerusalem was not “Woe,” but “Blessed.”

XL. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM MATTHEW 23

1. True Greatness Is Found in Humility

God calls us to serve, not to exalt ourselves.

The Pharisees loved seats, titles, and honor.

Jesus calls His followers to be servants.

Principle:

The greatest in God's kingdom is the one who serves.

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2. Religious Hypocrisy Is Dangerous

Outward appearances mean nothing if the heart is corrupt.

A clean cup, a white tomb, and a wide phylactery cannot hide a heart from God.

Principle:

God judges the heart, not the appearance.

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3. God Values Justice, Mercy, and Faithfulness

These are weightier matters than outward rituals.

Small acts of obedience matter, but they must never replace love for God and people.

Principle:

Do not strain out the gnat and swallow the camel.

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4. Judgment Comes to the Unrepentant

Those who reject God's messengers will be held accountable.

God's patience is long, but it is not endless.

Principle:

Rejecting God's Word brings God's judgment.

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5. God Longs to Gather His People

Even in judgment, His heart is full of mercy and compassion.

Jesus wept over the city that would reject Him.

Principle:

The arms of Jesus are open wide, like wings, to all who will come.

XLI. THE SEVEN WOES

Jesus pronounced seven woes against religious hypocrisy.

Each one is a warning to religious people in every age.

Woe 1 — Shutting the Door (Verse 13)

They kept others from entering God's kingdom.

Warning: Do not stand between people and Jesus.

Woe 2 — Making False Converts (Verse 15)

They worked hard to bring people into empty religion.

Warning: Make disciples of Jesus, not followers of rules.

Woe 3 — Twisting Oaths (Verses 16–22)

They made loopholes so they could break their promises.

Warning: Let your word be true, because you always speak before God.

Woe 4 — Neglecting the Weightier Matters (Verses 23–24)

They counted spices but ignored justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Warning: Do not major on minor things.

Woe 5 — Cleaning the Outside Only (Verses 25–26)

They looked clean but were full of greed.

Warning: Let God clean your heart first.

Woe 6 — Whitewashed Tombs (Verses 27–28)

They looked alive but were spiritually dead.

Warning: Do not pretend to be what you are not.

Woe 7 — Honoring Dead Prophets (Verses 29–36)

They honored the prophets of the past while rejecting God's Messenger in the present.

Warning: Obey God's Word today, not just admire it from the past.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Every woe Jesus spoke to the Pharisees is a mirror He holds up to us.

XLII. THE OUTSIDE AND THE INSIDE

Matthew 23 shows a contrast between what people see and what God sees.

What People Saw

- Wide phylacteries
- Long tassels
- Important seats
- Honored titles
- Long prayers
- Careful tithing

- Clean cups
- White tombs
- Beautiful monuments

What God Saw

- Pride
- Love of honor
- Heavy burdens on others
- Greed
- Self-indulgence
- Dishonesty
- Lack of mercy
- Spiritual death
- Hatred of God's messengers

What God Wants

- A humble heart
- A servant's attitude
- An honest word
- Justice
- Mercy
- Faithfulness
- A clean heart
- A welcome for His Son

Key Truth

God is not impressed by what we show; He is concerned with who we are.

XLIII. WHAT MATTHEW 23 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

Matthew 23 reveals many truths about Jesus.

The One Teacher

He alone is the true Teacher of God's people.

The One Master

He is the Christ, the only Guide and Leader of His church.

The Servant King

He teaches that the greatest is the servant — and He lived it.

The Searcher of Hearts

He sees past every outward appearance to the heart.

The Righteous Judge

He speaks woes with divine authority.

The Sender of Messengers

He says, **“I am sending you prophets,”** speaking as God speaks.

The Prophet Who Was Rejected

He knew He would be treated like the prophets before Him.

The Compassionate Savior

He longs to gather His people like a hen gathers her chicks.

The Coming Lord

One day He will be welcomed with the words, **“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”**

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Jesus who spoke the woes is the same Jesus who wept over the city.

XLIV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What did it mean to “sit in Moses' seat”?

It meant having the role of teaching God's law to the people.

Question 2

Why did Jesus tell the people to do what the Pharisees taught but not what they did?

Because when they taught God's law, it was true, but their lives did not match their teaching.

Question 3

What heavy loads did the Pharisees put on people?

They added many man-made rules to God's law, making religion a crushing burden, and did nothing to help.

Question 4

What were phylacteries and tassels?

Phylacteries were small boxes holding Scripture verses worn on the forehead and arm. Tassels were reminders of God's commands sewn onto clothing.

Question 5

Why did Jesus tell His disciples not to be called “Rabbi,” “father,” or “master”?

Because they have one Teacher, one Father, and one Master. No human leader should take the honor that belongs to God.

Question 6

Who is the greatest in God's kingdom?

The one who serves others.

Question 7

What does the word “hypocrite” mean?

It first meant an actor wearing a mask. It describes someone who pretends to be something they are not.

Question 8

What is unusual about Matthew 23:14?

It does not appear in the oldest Greek manuscripts of Matthew, but the same words are found in Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47.

Question 9

What was wrong with the Pharisees' rules about oaths?

They created loopholes so people could make promises and then break them. Jesus taught that every promise is made before God.

Question 10

What are the “more important matters of the law”?

Justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Question 11

What did Jesus mean by straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel?

They were very careful about tiny details but ignored enormous sins.

Question 12

Why did Jesus compare the Pharisees to whitewashed tombs?

Because they looked beautiful and holy on the outside but were spiritually dead on the inside.

Question 13

Why was building tombs for the prophets hypocritical?

They honored prophets who were dead while rejecting and planning to kill Jesus, the greatest Messenger of God.

Question 14

What picture did Jesus use to show His love for Jerusalem?

A hen gathering her chicks under her wings to protect them.

Question 15

What should Matthew 23 change about the way Christians live today?

Matthew 23 should cause believers to live:

- Practicing what they preach.
- Lifting burdens instead of adding them.
- Doing good for God, not for an audience.
- Seeking to serve, not to be honored.
- Keeping their word.

- Practicing justice, mercy, and faithfulness.
- Letting God clean their hearts first.
- Being honest about who they really are.
- Welcoming God's Word today.
- Sharing the compassionate heart of Jesus.

XLV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Matthew 23 asks several important questions.

Do I Practice What I Preach?

Do I Put Heavy Burdens on Others, or Do I Help Carry Them?

Am I Doing Good Things So People Will Notice Me?

Do I Love Titles, Honor, or the Best Seats?

Am I Willing to Be a Servant?

Am I Making Disciples of Jesus or Followers of My Own Opinions?

Is My Word Always True?

Have I Neglected Justice, Mercy, or Faithfulness?

Am I Majoring on Minor Things?

Is the Inside of My Life as Clean as the Outside?

Am I Pretending to Be Something I Am Not?

Do I Honor God's Word in the Past but Resist It Today?

Have I Run to Jesus for Shelter Under His Wings?

XLVI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Clean the Inside of the Cup”

Jesus said:

“First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside will also be clean.”

Most people try to fix their lives from the outside in.

They change their habits.

They change their words.

They change their appearance.

But the heart stays the same.

That is religion without God.

Jesus teaches the opposite order.

First the inside.

Then the outside.

First the heart.

Then the hands.

We cannot clean our own hearts.

Only God can.

That is why we come to Jesus.

He forgives our sin.

He gives us a new heart.

He fills us with His Spirit.

And then, from a clean heart, a clean life begins to flow.

Principle:

God does not polish the outside of the cup; He makes the inside new.

XLVII. FINAL APPLICATION

Matthew Chapter 23 is the last public teaching of Jesus in the temple.

It begins with a warning.

The teachers of the law sat in Moses' seat.

But they did not practice what they preached.

They loved honor.

They loved titles.

They loved being seen.

Jesus calls His followers to a different way.

One Teacher.

One Father.

One Master.

And all of us brothers and sisters.

The greatest is the servant.

The humble will be lifted up.

Then Jesus speaks seven woes.

They shut the door of the kingdom.

They made converts to empty religion.

They twisted their promises.

They tithed spices but ignored justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

They cleaned the outside of the cup.

They were like whitewashed tombs.

They honored dead prophets while rejecting the living Messiah.

These woes are not only about the Pharisees.

They are about the danger that lives in every religious heart.

Any of us can become a Pharisee.

We can go to church, read the Bible, pray, and give — and still have a proud and empty heart.

But the chapter does not end with woe.

It ends with tears.

“How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.”

Jesus is not looking for actors.

He is looking for children to gather.

So today:

Stop performing.

Start serving.

Let Jesus clean your heart.

Practice justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Keep your word.

Run to Jesus and find shelter under His wings.

And until He returns:

Welcome Him with the words, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You that You see our hearts.

Thank You that nothing is hidden from You.

Forgive us for the times we have said one thing and done another.

Forgive us for doing good things just to be seen.

Forgive us for loving honor more than we love You.

Keep us from putting heavy burdens on others.

Teach us to help carry them instead.

Lord Jesus, You are our one Teacher, our one Master.

Father, You are our one Father in heaven.

Help us to see ourselves as brothers and sisters in Your family.

Make us servants, as You were a servant.

Help us to keep our word, knowing we always speak before Your throne.

Teach us to practice justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Keep us from straining out gnats and swallowing camels.

Clean the inside of our hearts.

Make us new from the inside out.

Keep us from being like whitewashed tombs.

Give us the courage to obey Your Word today, not only to admire it.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your tender heart.

Thank You for longing to gather us under Your wings.

Today we come.

We run to You for shelter.

We welcome You as the One who comes in the name of the Lord.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.” — Matthew 23:23

Central Truth

Jesus warns against religion that is outward, proud, and empty, calls His followers to humble service and true righteousness from the heart, and weeps over those who refuse His love.

Matthew 23 in One Sentence

Jesus warns the crowds and His disciples against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, calls His followers to humble service under one Teacher, one Father, and one Master, pronounces seven woes against religion that is clean on the outside but corrupt within, and grieves over Jerusalem, longing to gather her children like a hen gathers her chicks.