

Seven Woes – pt Giving 1-8-06

Matthew 23:13-24 (NIV)

¹³ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. ¹⁵ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. ¹⁶ "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' ¹⁷ You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?

¹⁸ You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' ¹⁹ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰ Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹ And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. ²² And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.

²³ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. 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. ²⁴ You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

Toward the end of the week leading up to the crucifixion, Jesus pulled out all the stops. The disciples were as trained as they needed to be. Jesus knew the hour of His suffering was approaching. One thing still needed to be done publicly. It was to rebuke the religious leaders of Israel. In doing so, Jesus gave them a chance to consider how far they had strayed from the Spirit of the Scriptures, and it helped those who were trapped in hopeless effort of works to see that the leaders had not arrived. The danger to the common person was to think that the scribes (teachers of the Law) and Pharisees were pleasing to God because they tried so hard to keep the Law. The people needed to understand that the works of these leaders had not been any more helpful in getting them close to God than their own efforts. (Titus 3:5)

¹³ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. Woe, pronounced oo-ah'-ee, was a cry of grief. God is grieved over their behavior. The pronouncement of woe was a tool that the prophets used. It was a way to declare the displeasure and curse of God. It was the opposite of blessing (beatitudes). First, Jesus says they are hypocrites, actors. They pretend they are keeping all the laws of Moses when they are not keeping the Spirit or the letter of the Law. They act as if they have arrived and found God's blessing and favor when in fact they were under a curse. They acted as if they were in God's special favor when all they really sought was the honor of man. (John 12:43)

This seduction is alive and well today with the same results. There are those that act as if through some effort they obtained special favor with God. Religious leaders will

Commented [notes1]: 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, Titus 3:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 43 for they loved praise from men more than praise from God. John 12:43 (NIV)

propound their special revelation or works that they project as having brought them to a special standing with God. It may be any number of good deeds, just as keeping the law was good in and of itself. It could be fasting, prayer, gifts of the Spirit, giving, or some special understanding of the Word. All those are good things, but they do not earn you favor with God. Relying on them to make you pleasing to God will keep you from heaven. There is only one way to heaven and that is through the Son. (John 14:6)

In Sedona I have met Christians who claimed to have a special revelation and found a special way to a deeper walk. One tried to tell me that what we are all missing is pleading Jesus' blood. Another claimed to have had an angel reveal to him that the church system is Babylon of Revelation. Another told me if we do not read the KJV and sing hymns only, we will never reach the youth. Those who claim to have a special relationship with God because of some action or revelation or effort, like the Pharisees, are not entering the kingdom and are shutting up the kingdom from others. God is pleased with His Son, period. (2 Peter 1:17) We could say that faith is the one thing that pleases God, but faith in what? It is faith in His provision, Jesus!

Verse 14 is not in the best and oldest manuscripts, though it can be found in Mark and Luke. Since it was probably not in Matthew's original text, we won't look into it at this time.

¹⁵ *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.* The second reason that God was grieved with those leaders was that their efforts to win converts and disciple them only made the converts twice the son of hell as they were. Ouch! They were converting people to works and rules, whereas God has always been drawing people to have faith in His provision. (Romans 4:9-16) When the Pharisees made a convert, they buried them in rules and regulations. The person may have been attracted to God who is the Creator of all things and to the amazing accounts in the old covenant of God in relationship with man. But once they were committed, they were turned from the desire for that relationship to trying to please God with efforts. (Hebrews 9:14)

God wants us to be the new creation that He has made upon rebirth. (2 Corinthians 5:17) He wants us to live in the communion of a deepening love relationship with Him, not mere rule keepers. The guidelines are there to help us know what is of God and what is not, not as a measuring stick of how much we are pleasing Him. Imagine a relationship in which the husband tells his wife 613 things to do or not do. He is pleased with her only when she gets them all right. If she misses one then he is angry with her. That is not a relationship. That is slavery! That was the Pharisaical relationship with God. They had missed the whole point. And so do we at times.

We hear a message on prayer or fasting or giving and we beat ourselves up thinking God is not pleased with our performance. That is the same thing the Pharisees were doing. The message we hear is that God is not pleased with us unless we perform, but true conviction of the Spirit draws us to change our life out of love, not duty. It draws us to change because we see the goodness that is offered to us like gifts from our loved One.

Commented [notes3]: 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
John 14:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."
2 Peter 1:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.

10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!

11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.

12 And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

14 For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless,

15 because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.
Romans 4:9-16 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death,¹³
Hebrews 9:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

I gave my wife a treadmill for Christmas. She could have said, "Oh no! I must be fat. He is not pleased with me. I have to run on this thing an hour everyday or he will not love me." Or she could think, "Look how much my husband loves me. He wants me to stay healthy. I will enjoy this so we can live a long and healthy life together." We do the same thing with sermons. "Oh no! God is not pleased with me because I am not praying enough. I better pray 15 minutes every morning, noon, and night, and then He will love me." Or we can see things as they really are and say, "God loves me so much He wants me to spend more time with Him. What a love He has for me. How He wants to meet my needs. I long to spend more time with Him!" I hope in that illustration helps you see why God is angry with people who teach works as a way to please Him.

¹⁶ *"Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.'* ¹⁷ *You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?* ¹⁸ *You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.'* ¹⁹ *You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?* ²⁰ *Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.* ²¹ *And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it.* ²² *And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.* I do not want to spend a lot of time on this point. He called them blind because of the way they twisted the Law for financial gain. They were, again, missing the spirit of the Law, and so misinterpreted the letter of the Law. The minutiae of legal opinion when taking vows were derided by Jesus here and other places in the Gospel. He summed it all up by saying, "Let your "Yes!" mean yes and your "No" mean no. (Matthew 5:37) Mean what you say and say what you mean. Do not try to get out of vows or commitments with technicalities, especially absurd ones like these that distorted the Scriptures.

²³ *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. 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.* ²⁴ *You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.* Once again, they missed the spirit of the Law and acted out of wrong motivations. They noticed little details while forgetting why the details were there. The emphasis is again on rules and not the heart in relationship with God. When your heart is acting in love for God, justice, mercy and faithfulness are the by-products. (Micah 6:8)

I want to take the rest of our time here this morning telling you the New Testament view of giving. Many refer to this text and say, "See, Jesus taught that we should tithe. He said do not neglect the former." There is one question I would like to ask them. Was Israel still under the Law? Until Jesus made the New Covenant in His blood they were. Would Jesus ever teach anything contrary to the Law? Of course not! But when we enter into the New Covenant by faith in what He did for us, we are no longer under the Law. You know that tithing was a custom even before the Law. Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils of war. (Hebrews 7:1-2) Abel gave of the firstborn of his flock. (Genesis 4:4) Before the Law, the conscience of man

Commented [notes8]: 37 Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. Matthew 5:37 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 1 This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, 2 and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Hebrews 7:1-2 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, Genesis 4:4 (NIV)

directed him to do things that would one day be in the Law. One thing you probably will not hear from those who insist that tithing is to be applied in the New Testament is that a portion of the tithe was eaten by the tither. (Deuteronomy 12:18) They took it to Jerusalem during the three different harvest times of the year and ate it before the LORD. Each of the three times was a harvest feast. So if you want to get technical, if you want to read the Law like a Pharisee, you can use part of your tithe to pay for potluck meals. (intended to add some humor)

Commented [notes12]: 18 Instead, you are to eat them in the presence of the LORD your God at the place the LORD your God will choose--you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns--and you are to rejoice before the LORD your God in everything you put your hand to.
Deut 12:18 (NIV)

There is no other ritual law that we insist on keeping over in the New Testament. Here is what the New Testament says about the Law. ¹⁴ *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,* ¹⁵ *by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.* Ephesians 2:14-15 (NIV) ¹³ *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,* ¹⁴ *having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.* Colossians 2:13-14 (NIV) Jesus took care of the Law for us, yet we do not kill, steal, or commit adultery. Those are moral laws. They are true in every age. We are freed from all the ritual and worship laws, but we have come under a new guideline, not one of the letter, but of the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:6)

Commented [notes13]: 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
2 Corinthians 3:6 (NIV)

Instead of giving our regulated amounts at specific times for specific causes as outlined in the Old Testament, we are free to be led by the Spirit. Instead of the 10% requirement, we now have the invitation of God to give out of a generous heart. We can experience the loving call of God to give as He leads which draws us into a deeper relationship with Him. Instead of receiving it as a command that we must obey, we can see it as a gift from Him. How can the call of the Spirit to give be a gift to us? Jesus said it is more blessed to give than receive. (Acts 20:35) He said when we give we will receive an abundance. (Luke 6:38) In giving, we lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven. (Matthew 6:20) The call to give is a call to be blessed. That is a gift from God. It is His invitation to us for a deeper and richer walk with Him.

Commented [notes14]: 35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'
Acts 20:35 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."
Luke 6:38 (NIV)

Some people have the gift of giving. They give and give and sometimes it looks like they give foolishly, but they always have enough. The Proverbs tell us that there are those who withhold, but tend to poverty, and there are those who scatter abroad and yet increase. (Proverbs 11:24) That does not make sense in a worldly way of thinking, and yet it makes perfect sense in the kingdom of God. Jesus gave it all, and that is why He is given the name above every name. (Philippians 2:8-9)

Commented [notes16]: 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.
Matthew 6:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 24 One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.
Proverbs 11:24 (NIV)

The Apostle Paul speaks about giving in several places. ¹ *Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.* ² *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.* 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 (NIV) He was telling them that every Sunday they should put aside some money according to their income. That is like the language used under the Old Covenant, that meant the proportion of 10%. (Deuteronomy 16:17) Those who lived on little could give a little, and those who made a lot were expected to give a lot. 10% would be a good guideline and in proportion to what you made, but what is the

Commented [notes18]: 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!
9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,
Phil 2:8-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 17 Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.
Deuteronomy 16:17 (NIV)

Spirit of God telling you to give? The Corinthian church boasted of being led by the Spirit but in fact they were immature, so they needed a reminder of the tithe as a guide. But look what he says should be the guide in the second letter to them.

6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (NIV) In this passage, the Apostle tells us that if we give a little we will get a little. If we give a lot, we will get a lot. The amount of your giving is not determined by what you give, but by how much you have left. (Luke 21:3-4) Paul told them and us to give as we have decided in our heart. Let the Spirit of God direct your heart. Are you going to give less than those who were under the Law? Don't let that put you on a guilt trip, but let it open your heart to the invitation of the Spirit. If you feel coerced, do not do it. If you sense the invitation of God, recognize it as the gift it is. Act in love, knowing that His invitation to give comes from His love for you. He wants you to be blessed. Then watch what God does. (Malachi 3:10)

Because there is so much misuse of this passage, I feel the need to clarify. If you are giving to get, your motive is selfishness. God will not bless selfishness. I have heard people say, "God is going to bless me financially because I just gave more than I could afford." Well, if your motivation was to get, I hope you experience some poverty to realize God does not bless selfishness or greed. Nor will God bless your poor testimony to those to whom you are in debt. The Apostle Paul tells us to work hard and manage our finances well so that we can give. (Ephesians 4:28)

I watched in shock at a church I visited when a so-called preacher helped everyone develop the spirit of giving. Of course, the promise was that they would reap much more than they sowed. He walked away with an offering to him personally that was overflowing from his pockets. Too bad he could not deliver himself from greed. We are so gullible. God wants us to have a generous spirit, not so that we can get rich, but because He is generous. He wants us to be like Him, to love like He loves, and give like He gives, because it is good for us and for others.

I looked at a number of sermons on the subject of giving to share with you but I could not preach one of them because none of them encourage you to hear from God and learn to give at His leading. Oh, they mention it, but in the end they all come down to a commitment led by man. I have higher hopes of you than that. I do not want you to obey rules. I want you to learn to give as you walk in communion with the Holy Spirit. He may tell you to start at 10%. He may tell the widow to do less. He may tell some to give more. Here is the bottom line to me, will you hear from Him and give in loving cooperation with the Holy Spirit? Then your giving will be blessed and fruitful. Then you will share God's generous heart. It is not a program. It is not a rule. It is an invitation to a deeper walk with God. Will you accept it?

This is a generous church. We gave 20% to missions. That is more than any church I am familiar with. We give to the needy among us and outside the church as well. I had a number of people give me Christmas things to pass on to those in the church who are less fortunate financially. God blesses the heart that gives anonymously

Commented [notes20]: 3 "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 4 All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." Luke 21:3-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. Malachi 3:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Ephesians 4:28 (NIV)

because they feel led to. We have given away cars this year. This is an invitation for you to be a part of that generosity. Will you give as the LORD leads you? Bow your heads right now and ask the LORD, "What would you have me give as an offering of gratitude to You this morning? What do you want my baseline giving to be each week or month?" Maybe you have been operating on rule instead of giving at God's direction. Will you change that today and ask God frequently, "Lord, what would you have me give? Is there a need around me that You want to meet through me?"
- Offering- Sing Give Thanks

Some pastors think I am a bit crazy to not get a pledge or insist on ten percent. I think I would be missing the mark by not inviting you to give as the Spirit of God leads. I believe we, as a church, will be blessed for it. I have seen it over the past 3 years. God is faithful. We always give as we are led, and God meets all the need. Isn't that what He promised in His word? You cannot please God with your giving. He is already pleased with His Son. But you can enter into the generous Spirit of the Son as you walk in loving communion with Him. He is the greatest giver you will ever meet, and the more closely you walk with Him, the more you will be like Him.