

Seven Woes part 2 1-15-06

Matthew 23:25-39

²⁵ "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. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. ²⁷ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. ²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. ²⁹ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. ³⁰ And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' ³¹ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! ³³ "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation. ³⁷ "O 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, but you were not willing. ³⁸ Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' "

We are continuing with the last three of the seven woes Jesus pronounced upon the religious leaders of His day. By way of review, let me sum up the first four. Woe – oo-ah'-ee – a cry of grief upon those who slam the gates of heaven closed in the face of those seeking to enter. They did this by misleading the people away from trusting faith and to relying on works instead. The second woe was because they made the converts twice the sons of hell, twice as reliant on rules and self-righteousness as they were. The third was because they perverted the truth of the Old Covenant in their interpretation of which vows were binding. It was a way to avoid following through on their commitments to God. And the fourth was for inverting what was important. Jesus said that they strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel. The gnat was the smallest unclean creature and the camel the largest. When they drank their wine, they sifted it through their teeth so as to be careful not to drink an unclean bug that might have found its way into the wine. They focused on the little things while ignoring the big things. They majored on the minors. They tithed of the leaves from their herbs while ignoring justice, mercy and faithfulness.

We continue today with the Jesus' last three cries of "oo-ah'-ee" upon them. ²⁵ "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. ²⁶ Blind

Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. The Pharisees had a special ritual of cleansing things such as the cups and dishes they used so that they would not be defiled. (Mark 7:4) He was illustrating the corruption of their hearts and their attention to appearances with a carefully cleaned dish in which was placed rotting food. The heart of man must change before his outward actions are acceptable to God. (Matthew 15:19-20)

Commented [notes1]: 4 When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.
Mark 7:4 (NIV)

Jesus used descriptive words to tell what rottenness was in them. "Inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence." The Greek word for greed carries the idea of plundering, pillaging, and extortion. (Ephesians 5:5) The word for self-indulgence was used to tell of unrestrained self-gratification. They were not only robbing the people financially in the outer court through their system of selling pre-approved sacrifices at vastly inflated prices, but they were also robbing their souls through false teaching and bad examples. The heart behind their rituals was greed and self-indulgence.

Commented [notes2]: 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'
Matthew 15:19-20 (NIV)

What is in your heart? Without the transforming work of the Spirit of Christ through the cross, our hearts are just as greedy and self-indulgent. All our church attendance, giving, good deeds, and righteous acts are like beautiful ornate china plate loaded with garbage, if our heart has not been transformed. God does not look at the plate; He looks at the heart. If you are trusting in your good deeds to please God, then you are as blind as those whom Jesus was addressing. Spiritual blindness says that I can please God by something other than His provision of Jesus. (John 15:5)

Commented [notes3]: 5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.
Ephesians 5:5 (NIV)

²⁷ *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. ²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.* Jesus is using a common Hebrew tool of repeating His point with a different verbiage. After the spring rains but before Passover, the people of Jerusalem would whitewash the tombs so that no one would accidentally defile themselves by touching them and then be unable to participate in the sacrifices. (Numbers 19:11) Because of this Jerusalem glistened beautifully in the sun during Passover. Jesus was saying that the Pharisees were like those tombs, beautiful on the outside but rotten to the core. They defiled everyone they meet. What is in your heart determines the affect you will have with those you meet. As you meet unbelievers, do you draw them to Jesus, or turn them away?

Commented [notes4]: 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.
John 15:5 (NIV)

²⁹ *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. ³⁰ And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' ³¹ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!* For several centuries before Christ, the Pharisees had been the instigators of building tombs for the prophets. They raised the money and gave the speeches. Since it was their own ancestors that killed them, they apparently made some strong disclaimers that if they were around in those days things would have been different. In reality, they were about to kill the Son of God. Instead of learning of their weakness from the examples of their ancestors, they followed their

Commented [notes5]: 11 "Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days.
Numbers 19:11 (NIV)

example. (Jeremiah 2:30) The past should have humbled them and caused them to be open to the Messiah's coming. Instead, they hardened themselves to the Messiah and rejected God's messengers in the same way. We will see it in the book of Acts. Even though they knew the Apostles were anointed by God, they still tried to keep the message stifled by killing the messengers. (Acts 4:16-18)

I see it happen repeatedly in churches today. God sends an anointed Pastor to try and help a dying church get on its feet. The church bosses, the leaders of the past, think they are serving God when they try to get rid of him before he can make the changes the church needs. It is a fight for control and power instead of serving in humility. It is happening throughout the U.S. They do not kill them; they just leave them so discouraged and emotionally beaten up that they leave the ministry.

³³ "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Here, at the end of Jesus' ministry, the Spirit of God has Jesus call them the same thing that John the Baptist called them before Jesus' ministry began. (Matthew 3:7) They had not changed. They were still the same in spite of the message they heard. A viper was a snake that was sometimes mistaken for a branch. People that gathered firewood might mistakenly pick one up and be bitten. (Acts 28:3) Jesus was saying they were not only deceitful but deadly as well.

Sometimes farmers would burn what was left of the previous harvest stubble to kill the seeds of the weeds and keep the nutrients in the stalks from blowing away. Vipers would come out of their holes and try to escape the fire, but were usually overtaken by the fire. Jesus declared that the same would happen to them. They could run, but there was no escaping the judgment of God upon them for misleading the people. (Hebrews 10:29)

The word for hell used here is *gehena*. Outside of the walls of Jerusalem was a valley. In earlier times, those who worshipped Molech would sacrifice their children there. It was that age's form of abortion. King Josiah declared the place unclean, and it became a trash heap. (2 Kings 23:13) Fires in the garbage would burn continually. All their works and self-righteous actions would end up on that garbage pile. All their efforts to be clean through works would wind them up in that unclean inferno. That is the end result of all our actions to please God apart from His own provision of Jesus.

³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation. That generation would be the recipients of the preaching of men and women empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They would declare plainly the way to God through the sacrifice of Jesus. (Acts 2:36-38) At least 10 of the 12 apostles would be murdered. Elders of Christian congregations would be dragged off and stoned. Some would be turned over to Rome to be burned alive or fed to lions. They chased the Apostle Paul and others from town to town. (Acts 17:13)

Commented [notes6]: 30 "In vain I punished your people; they did not respond to correction. Your sword has devoured your prophets like a ravening lion. Jeremiah 2:30 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 16 "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. 17 But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name." 18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Acts 4:16-18 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Matthew 3:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 3 Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. Acts 28:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 29 How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? Hebrews 10:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 13 The king also desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption--the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the people of Ammon. 2 Kings 23:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." 37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:36-38 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 13 When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. Acts 17:13 (NIV)

This is an amazing prophecy, for it tells us that Jesus knew details of what was about to take place. We will see more prophetic details from Jesus in the next chapter. That revelation assured the new believers of the early church that things were not out of control. It tells us that God is sovereign even in the midst of persecution. Some people today would like to tell us that the Apostles distorted the message. The Da Vinci Code is about to be released as a major motion picture that says as much. It is nonsense! (see sermon Duh Vinci Code) To say so is to declare Jesus a poor judge of character, and that this prophecy was written after the fact.

In 70 A.D. judgment fell. God required the blood of the prophets from A to Z from that generation. The Roman army of 80,000 led by Titus surrounded Jerusalem and demanded the Jews surrender. The Jews killed the emissaries and mocked the Romans' offer. Titus response was brutal and complete. Thousands of Jews were crucified around Jerusalem and in Galilee. God allowed the Romans to abolish the Temple worship and end the sacrifices because the one true sacrifice was complete, that of Jesus for the sins of the world. (Hebrews 9:26)

There comes a time when God's Spirit no longer strives with man. (Genesis 6:3) Pharaoh hardened his heart until there was no possibility of repentance. Then, God hardened it and destroyed him. (Exodus 10:20) Many of those religious leaders that persecuted Jesus saw His miracles and hardened their heart. They heard His words and became irrevocably hardened. (John 15:22-24) They saw the miracles of the Apostles. They watched the martyrs die with grace and still hardened their hearts. Their lives cried out for judgment upon them, and judgment came.

God's Spirit works upon our hearts in the same way. He pleads with us. He brings us through the trials of life. (Deuteronomy 30:1-4) He arranges for us to hear the Word. He sends us witnesses. His Spirit arranges our life so that we are confronted by the truth repeatedly. We will either yield and find new life in His Son, or we will become irrevocably hardened and be judged. Those religious leaders had the words of the prophets and the life of Jesus and the Apostles. We have all that and more. We have 2000 years of testimonies of the lives of believers. Has it resulted in us being surrendered to the Lord or hardened? The condition of your heart is the answer.

³⁷ "O 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, but you were not willing. In spite of the evil in the hearts of man, Jesus longs to gather us under His wings. Jesus is using the picture of the LORD gathering His own from Psalm 91. (Psalm 91:4) It is incredible how many times Jesus refers to Himself as the LORD when you know the Old Covenant background of His declarations. He wants to gather us there because the Devourer is flying about. The Prince of the kingdom of the air is seeking a stray one to snatch up and consume. (1 Peter 5:8) He cannot touch the mother hen because she is too big. He would have a fight on his hands. But you and I are little chicks. The people of Jerusalem were little chicks. Every once in awhile we see the shadow of that great vulture glide across the ground near us and we run close to Jesus. Then we get complacent and distracted and wonder off. Are you listening to His warning calls and living under His wings?

Commented [notes14]: 26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.
Hebrews 9:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 3 Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."
Genesis 6:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 20 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.
Exodus 10:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin.
23 He who hates me hates my Father as well.
24 If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.
John 15:22-24 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 1 When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations,
2 and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today,
3 then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.
4 Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back.
Deuteronomy 30:1-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
Psalms 91:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.
1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

The problem with the Pharisees was that they were not willing to come to Jesus. The vulture was circling, but they held their heads high and refused to come to Jesus. That did not make Jesus glad; it broke His heart. They were not willing. You see, it requires willingness. Jesus will not force you to come under His wings. The mother hen calls out her warning to the chicks and the wise and willing ones come running to safety. This 23rd chapter of Matthew is a call of warning, a plea to run to Jesus, but they were not willing. Are you? Their pride held them back.

³⁸ Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' "If they could only have seen with the eyes of faith what Jesus saw. If they could have looked and seen the desolation of the house of Israel that was soon to take place. (Matthew 24:2) If they could have seen Jesus coming again in glory with the host of heaven. (Matthew 25:31) If they could see those who survive in Israel one day declaring, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." That is a quote from the Messianic Psalm 118. A few verses earlier it declared that the stone the builders rejected would become the capstone (Psalm 118:20-22), but they were blind to it.

Can you look and see with eyes of faith that everything will one day be consumed by fire and the elements will melt with a great heat? (2 Peter 3:12) Can you see that all that man labors for, his pride and position, means nothing to God? Can you see that greed and self-gratification will be meaningless when your time comes? (Luke 12:20) Unless you receive the righteousness of Jesus by faith, Jesus can say to you too, "Look your house is left to you desolate." Unless you were willing and find yourself under His wings, then you will not see Him again until your knee is made to bow and you declare, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

In this world where things appear differently than they truly are, we have a hard time deciding that humility and faith are more appealing than greed and self-gratification. Jesus' words blow away the fog and show things as they truly are. You have One who lovingly calls out an urgent warning. "Come under My wings or be devoured." When you look at it like that, it is not a confusing choice. Do you want to live or die? But we instinctively know that if we are willing to run to Him, life will never be the same. We will recognize that He is Lord of all, and we will not have to wait until the day we see Him with our physical eyes. By faith, today, we will say "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord."

If you have not made that step of faith, won't you make it this morning? Are you under His wings? If you are not, there is not a better time to run there than right now. Is your outside clean but the inside rotting? Jesus is the answer. He transforms us from the inside out. Come to Jesus! Find refuge in the shadow of His wings. Find the One worth living for.

Commented [notes21]: 2 "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."
Matthew 24:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory."
Matthew 25:31 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 20 This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.
21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.
22 The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone;
Psalms 118:20-22 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.
2 Peter 3:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"
Luke 12:20 (NIV)