

Sent: Wednesday, April 1, 2020 1:47 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Matthew 23 (On-Line)

"Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted!"
(Matthew 23:12)

After Jesus addressed the questions posed by the Jewish religious and political leaders (the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians) and "no one was able to answer Him a word...nor dare from that day on ask Him another question" (as recorded in Matthew 22), Jesus began His final discourse in Matthew 23! In fact, these were the final words Jesus would speak to the crowds of people that had been following Him! And He began with a somewhat surprising statement: that the people should "do and observe all that the scribes and Pharisees tell them!" Since they had "seated themselves in the chair of Moses" (perhaps referring to the large stone in front of the synagogue). And were, in fact, the "leaders" of the Jewish faith, and had the responsibility to read and teach the sacred Scriptures! Jesus seemed to be making the point that to the extent they stuck to, and actually taught the Word of God rightly (which they didn't! of course), they should be heard!

But He then added (and this made all the difference!): "But do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them!" They, instead, "lay heavy burdens on men's shoulders...and do all their deeds to be noticed by men... and love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogue... and love being called 'Rabbi' by the people"! (Joel Benson, last nite, called it "all a show"!) And then Jesus would proceed to make, according to MacArthur, the "most fearful and dreadful statement concerning the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus ever uttered on earth"! The great theologian John Walvoord noted that "no passage in the Bible is more biting, more pointed, and more severe than this pronouncement of Christ upon the Pharisees"!

But before giving the "eight woes" (woes, speaking of "what sorrow awaits you"), Jesus spoke again of what it meant for a person "to be great among them"--and it's all about being a "servant"! And having "servant's heart"! As He had said in Matthew 20:24-28, "...Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant, just as the Son of Man (speaking of Himself) did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many!" Which brings us to our memory verse: "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted!" (Matthew Henry wrote: "Honor is like a shadow, which flees from those who pursue it, and grasp for it, but follows those who flee from it!")

And then come the eight "woes," which represent basically a collective criticism of the hypocrisy of Israel's religious leaders--and which, in essence, were expressions of grief and sorrow by Jesus, uttered out of concerns for the wrongs these religious leaders were doing to other people, and for the judgment they were about to bring on themselves! Verse 13 says: "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in!.... You devour widows' houses and, for a pretense, make long prayers...then make proselytes who become twice as much a son of hell! Therefore, you will receive greater condemnation!" Wow!

He calls them "blind guides," who even concocted their own rules which allowed people to "swear," or make "oaths" by certain things, e.g., by the temple, and not be bound by them, and to swear by other things, e.g., the "gold" of the temple, and be bound! In other words, encouraging "evasive oaths" that amounted to lying! Jesus had already dealt with this issue, in Matthew 5:33-37 (in His Sermon on the Mount) where He said not to make any oaths at all (speaking here, according to MacArthur, of the "flippant, profane, or careless use of oaths employed in that culture for deceptive purposes"). Jesus said that one should "let your yes be yes, and your no, no"! One's word alone should be enough!

He spoke, in verses 23-24, of how they (the scribes and Pharisees) were such "sticklers" for small details, but blind to the "great principles," neglecting the "weightier provisions of the Law, like justice, and mercy, and faithfulness"--and describing them as "blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel"! Interestingly, He chose the comparison between "gnat" and "camel" not just because of their difference in size (and ability to be "swallowed"! but also because of the similar sounds of the words themselves, in Greek, "galma" for gnat, and "gamla" for camel! Ha! (Jesus was probably referring, in speaking of "weightier matters," to Micah 6:8, which says: "He (God) has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly before your God!" (And this is a good reminder for us just as much today!)

In verses 27-28, He then likened the scribes and Pharisees to "whitewashed tombs"! On the outside they appeared well, but on the inside, they were full of decay! (Great analogy!) Shepherd's Notes states that before Passover tombs were whitewashed, not only to beautify them, but also so that pilgrims could see them clearly and not be "defiled" by accidentally walking on them! If they did, they would then be considered "contaminated" and thus precluded from participating in Passover ceremonies!

And, lastly, in verses 29-36, He accused them of "testifying against themselves about being the sons of those who had murdered the prophets" and that, as a "brood of vipers," they were about to "fill up the full measure of the guilt of their fathers (by killing Jesus and others who would come in His name)! He said, "upon them would fall the guilt of the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, to the blood of Zechariah" (the first and last ones recorded as "righteous" martyrs in the Old Testament)! Ironically, in a matter of days, the Jewish leaders, and the very people listening, would cry out for the crucifixion of Jesus, leading them to even shout (in Matthew 27:25), "His blood be upon us and our children"! (David Platt notes that "those who called for His crucifixion truly did "fill up the full measure of their fathers' sins!) Wow!

Well, judgment would come! And we next see, as a closing reflection of the grief and sorrow borne by Jesus, His "lamentation" over Jerusalem and its people, and the compassion He expressed, about "how often He wanted to gather them together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but that they were unwilling"! The temple, which is the "house" Jesus referred to in verse 38, would be utterly desolated within a matter of years, with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by Titus, the Roman emperor! But with much greater eternal judgment yet to come!

But the "good news" in this passage is that, because of the upcoming death of Jesus on the cross, salvation for sinners would be available to all who would believe, and the kingdom of heaven was still to come, and the exaltation of Jesus was guaranteed! Jesus is coming again! This is affirmed in verse 39 with Jesus' words that they (the crowds of people listening) would not see Jesus again "until"...! Until they would see Him again (which is still to come!) and recognize Him as Messiah! And say: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord"! (More on "things to come" in next week's lesson!)

What better way to end our study of Matthew 23! Jesus is coming again!

And so, men, let's go with God, and not only read and study the Word of God rightly, but live it out fully this week, and especially during this time of "national" and "world crisis" (and with the "hand of God" at work, and the humbling of nations and people before our eyes) until we see Him face-to-face!

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