

***“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...”***

**Matthew 23**

In this chapter Jesus speaks harshly; however, this is not the language of personal irritation, but of divine warning and condemnation. In the last three verses Jesus speaks with compassion, and we see (a) the purpose of all history; (b) the tragedy of all history; and (c) the triumph of all history...

***The way of the scribes and Pharisees and the way of Jesus (Matthew 23 v 1 to 12)***

The scribes and Pharisees (a) lay oppressive burdens on others (v 1 to 4); and (b) do their works to be seen by others, (v 5 to 10). These verses contrast the way of the Pharisees with the way of Jesus: service and humility (v 11, 12).

- These verses are an indictment of the Pharisees because of their concern for personal prestige and outward show. “They do all their deeds to be seen by others” (v 5) – how does Jesus illustrate this point (v 6, 7)? In what ways can this happen within the church? How does this temptation come?
- What does Jesus teach about believers’ relationships to the Lord, and to each other (v 8 to 12)?

Jesus says respect is due to the scribes and Pharisees, not because of their conduct, but because they “sit on Moses’ seat” (v 2) – an office of authority ordained by God. Jesus’ accusations could apply to many church leaders today, who make Christianity a set of burdensome rules to follow. The early church rejected legalism when it insisted that obedience to Moses’ Law was not essential to Christian faith (Acts 15 v 10). Jesus’ burden is light, and his yoke is easy (Matthew 11 v 30). The religious leaders were guilty of advertising their righteousness – both the “phylacteries” (small leather boxes containing scrolls of scripture, tied to the arm and head with leather straps) and the “fringes” of their robes (v 6) were worn in supposed conformity to the Law (Deuteronomy 11 v 18; Numbers 15 v 37 to 40).

***Eight woes to the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23 v 13 to 36)***

These eight woes to the scribes and Pharisees stand in contrast to the eight beatitudes proclaimed in Matthew 5 v 3 to 12:

1. The poor in spirit enter the kingdom (Matt 5 v 3);  
the Pharisees deny entry to the kingdom to everyone (v 13).
2. The mourners are comforted (Matt 5 v 4);  
the Pharisees take advantage of widows and are condemned (v 14).
3. The meek inherit the earth (Matt 5 v 5);  
the proud and zealous Pharisees send converts to hell (v 15).
4. The hungry for righteousness are satisfied (Matt 5 v 6);  
the Pharisees, greedy for gain, are blind (v 16 to 22).
5. The merciful receive mercy (Matt 5 v 7);  
the Pharisees neglect justice, mercy and faithfulness (v 23, 24).
6. The pure in heart shall see God (Matt 5 v 8);  
the Pharisees, full of greed, are defiled in heart (25, 26).
7. The peacemakers are sons of God (Matt 5 v 9);  
the Pharisees appear good but are spiritually dead (27, 28).
8. The persecuted inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5 v 10 to 12); the Pharisees, themselves persecutors, are called sons of the devil and are sentenced to hell (v 29 to 36).

***[MORE OVER...]***

While v 14 is not found in some manuscripts, a similar sentiment is expressed in Mark 12 v 40 and in Luke 20 v 47.

- Note the repetition of the word “hypocrite”, which literally means ‘play-actor’. How is this hypocrisy seen in the attitude of the Pharisees to others (v 13 to 15); and in their vows and promises (v 16 to 22)? What do we need to do to avoid similar behaviour?
- Jesus accuses the Pharisees of a lack of proportion in their religious practices (v 23 to 26), and of hatred and persecution (v 27 to 39). What are some modern examples of these dangerous tendencies?

### ***Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23 v 37 to 39)***

- (a) *The purpose of all history (v 37a)*: that God would gather his children together (Jerusalem is a synecdoche for Israel). The image of a mother bird gathering and covering her young is a familiar one – Moses used it in his farewell address (Deuteronomy 32 v 11). It is a picture of tender care, and a willingness to die to protect others – and Jesus died for the sins of the world, including Israel, but “his own people did not receive him” (John 1 v 11).
- (b) *The tragedy of all history (v 37b, 38)*: Israel’s rejection of her Messiah (“you were not willing”), followed by God’s judgment (“your house is left to you desolate”). May we share Jesus’ broken heart for a lost humanity!
- (c) *The triumph of all history (v 39)*: “until” – Jesus leaves the nation with a promise – he will return, and Israel will say “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Psalm 118 v 26). See also Hosea 5 v 15 and Romans 11 v 25, noting the word ‘until’. It will take a great deal to bring Israel to this point, but God will do it: the Jews will welcome Jesus back at his Second Coming. and so “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11 v 26a).