

Matthew 23:13-39 | “An Exposé of Hypocrisy”
Preached on April 28, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can flip in your Bibles to Matthew 23, verse 13. *[pause]*

We will be starting in verse 13, but covering the rest of the chapter this morning. [pauseeee]

Robert Wenz shares this interesting fact about “The Queen Mary” which was “the largest ship to cross the oceans when it was launched in 1936. *[pause]*

Through four decades and a World War she served until she was retired, anchored as a floating hotel and museum in Long Beach, California. [pause]

During the conversion, her three massive smokestacks were taken off to be scraped down and repainted, but on the dock they crumbled. *[pause]*

Nothing was left of the 3/4th inch steel plate from which the stacks had been formed.

All that remained were more than thirty coats of paint that had been applied over the years. The steel had rusted away.”¹ *[pauseeee]*

Isn't that such an accurate picture of hypocrisy?

Layers of paint covering up rust, which disintegrates when you get close to it. *[pauseeee]*

Matthew 23 is all about hypocrisy.

Last week, we saw how we are not to follow the bad example of hypocrites, and now today, Jesus will really push home the awfulness of hypocrisy. *[pauseeee]*

We don't always see hypocrisy as that big of a deal in our lives. [pause]

Now we see it as a big deal when *other people* are hypocrites, but when we do it, we try to excuse it away or brush it off.

But how serious are we about fighting and warring against sin? [pauseeee]

In this passage, Jesus will show us that hypocrisy is such a big deal, and we should view it the same way as Christ.

So let's READ it, shall we? [READ]

Can anyone say, “Wow”? *[pause]*

Jesus gives a full-fledged, no-holding-back exposé of hypocrisy against the scribes and Pharisees. [pause]

¹ <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/h/hypocrisy.htm>.

He goes on and on revealing the true hideous nature of the religious leaders by giving 7 woe's against them. *[pauseeee]*

In these woe's, Jesus is denouncing their hypocritical lives, and reveals their true nature by calling them many things. *[pause]*

Just consider all that He calls them...

He calls them 'hypocrites' SIX times! *[pause]*

Not only that, but He calls them children of hell and sons of murderers - now those are some titles that no one would want. *[pause]*

He labels them as blind guides twice, and also blind fools, blind men, and blind Pharisees.

And no one can forget how He calls them white-washed tombs, serpents, and a brood of vipers. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus was making it ultra clear: the scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites, and Jesus is absolutely against hypocrisy. *[pauseeee]*

He wants us to feel the seriousness of this, as is indicated by giving 7 woe statements. *[pause]*

To pronounce a woe was to essentially say, "How dreadful for these people!" *[pause]*

It's a way to highlight the terrible situation one is in or will be in.

So Jesus is not exulting or rejoicing over the fate of the scribes and Pharisees.

Rather, He's pronouncing a verdict, which is done with both seriousness and sorrow. *[pauseeee]*

It's through this denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees that we see some things about what a hypocrite does.

And Lord willing, hearing these things should cause us to root out *any* evidence of hypocrisy in our own lives. *[pause]*

First, we see that...

I. A hypocrite's walk doesn't match their talk.

This is often the thing that immediately comes to our mind when we think of a hypocrite. *[pause]*

It's the person who gets on *you* about not eating healthy, then you see *them* putting away cupcakes, burgers, fries, and all that stuff right after telling you that. *[pause]*

If you saw that, you would probably say, "You hypocrite!" *[pause]*

Why?

Because their walk didn't match their talk.

They held you to one standard, while they did the opposite. *[pauseeee]*

That's what the scribes and Pharisees would do.

They would call others to do hard things, but wouldn't do it themselves. *[pauseeee]*

Their lives didn't match their teaching.

That's so easy to do, isn't it?

It's easier to say things, than to actually live it out.

It's easier to hear things, than to do them. *[pause]*

It's kind of like how much easier it is to talk about a big project at your house that needs to be done, than it is to set aside time and work hard at actually doing it. *[pauseeee]*

Like I said last week, the truth isn't meant to just sit in our brains, but it's supposed to be lived out in our actions.

But that's not what these men were doing, for they knew all the right answers and all the religious jargon, but their lives didn't keep up with it all. *[pauseeeee]*

Another example of the scribes and Pharisees' walk not matching their talk is found in verses 29 and following. *[pause]*

There Jesus says that they "build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous."

They even say, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." *[pause]*

Yet Jesus points out that they may say that, but their actions show otherwise.

They will continue in the way of their murdering fathers, for they will kill and persecute people that Christ will send to them in the future. *[pauseeee]*

You see, hypocrites *love* to say, "I would never do that!" *[pause]*

They love to look at the sins of others and boldly declare that they would never do such a horrible thing, as they look down on other people. *[pauseeee]*

It's like someone who says, "I would never cheat on my wife like that guy," all the while they are behind-the-scenes looking at pornography. *[pause]*

It's like someone who says, "I would never get fired for yelling at someone at work," yet they yell at their spouse and kids at home. *[pauseeee]*

Hypocritical pride says, "I would never do that!" but humility says, "But for the grace of God, there go I." *[pauseeee]*

Think about how you treat other people who have a big sin or moral failing.

Do you look down on them, and think, "I would never do that."?

Or are you prayerfully and humbly looking to God to help you each and every day not to ever get to that point? *[pauseeee]*

The scribes and Pharisees could act all religious and high up, even decorating the tombs of the prophets, but they themselves were found opposing God by opposing Christ. *[pause]*

Their walk didn't match their talk.

If they truly loved the prophets, then they would truly love Christ. *[pauseeee]*

This is something that we must evaluate in our own lives all the time...

Does my walk match my talk?

Does what I say and my public persona match what I'm like when no one is watching? *[pauseeee]*

Wouldn't it be such a blessing to know that those closest people to you could say, "What he was like in public is what he was like in private."? *[pause]*

Wouldn't it be amazing to hear, "What you saw in her life is what she really was."? *[pauseeee]*

Something else really big that we find in this passage about a hypocrite is this...

II. A hypocrite focuses only on the small and external things.

We see this come out in numerous places in Jesus' woes directed towards the religious leaders. *[pause]*

One of the things they did was that they did their deeds in order to be seen. *[pauseeee]*

"During one of his political campaigns, a delegation called on Theodore Roosevelt at his home in Oyster Bay, Long Island. *[pause]*

The President met them with his coat off and his sleeves rolled up. *[pause]*

'Ah, gentlemen,' he said, 'come down to the barn and we will talk while I do some work.' *[pause]*

At the barn, Roosevelt picked up a pitchfork and looked around for the hay. Then he called out, ‘John, where’s all the hay?’

‘Sorry, sir,’ John called down from the hayloft. ‘I ain’t had time to toss it back down again after you pitched it up while the Iowa folks were here.’”² *[pauseeee]*

That’s what these religious leaders were like -- doing things to impress others. *[pause]*

They put on an outward show, but it wasn’t real. *[pauseeee]*

There can sometimes be a fine line when it comes to serving God.

We can say, “Oh, it’s only because I want to help others.”

But that desire for recognition creeps in there, doesn’t it? *[pause]*

So as you live day-by-day, ask yourself, “Would I do this if no one saw or knew about it?”

The answer to that question often reveals your heart. *[pauseeeee]*

Another thing that the scribes and Pharisees did was that they would obsess over small, external things and ignore the most important things. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus talks about how they would say that if you swore an oath by the temple, it wouldn’t count.

Yet if you swore by the gold of the temple, then you were bound by it. *[pause]*

Basically, they were creating these loopholes to get out of being bound by an oath. *[pause]*

These oath loopholes would make it seem like they were godly, for they could swear by the temple, yet they would be covered, if they didn’t come through. *[pause]*

As one commentator said, “The leaders of Israel had perverted the law into a man-made version that allowed them to get away with a show of obedience while avoiding true obedience.”³

[pauseeee]

They should have been focused on what God actually cares about: speaking the truth.

They should just be truthful, and not look for ways to appear godly, while not actually being godly. *[pauseeee]*

They were focused on the external things, while ignoring the heart of the matter. *[pause]*

This tendency in them is found in how they would tithe mint, dill, and cumin, but would neglect justice, mercy, and faithfulness. *[pauseeee]*

² *Bits & Pieces*, November 12, 1992, pp. 19-20. Found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/h/hypocrisy.htm>.

³ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, vol. 1, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 378.

It's kind of like a person tithing off of 5 dollars they made when they sold something, all the while, they are ripping people off and making money off of them. *[pause]*

It's like the person who makes sure his hair is perfectly cut and dress clothes are nice for Sunday, all the while, during the week he treats people like dirt and doesn't care. *[pauseeee]*

How could you so obsess over those smaller things, while ignoring the most important heart issues? *[pause]*

It's because the smaller things are often easier to deal with and control. *[pause]*

It's easier to tithe on something, or look "clean cut" than it is to deal with your heart and character. *[pause]*

It's easier to follow some Pharisaical standard than it is to root out selfishness, pride, and envy. *[pauseeee]*

These smaller things also make it look like you are extra godly, for "wow!" you do even those small things.

Yet are you neglecting the weightier things? *[pausee]*

Let me ask you some examination questions...

Are you more focused on making sure that your house is spotless, all the while, you put little effort into your marriage? *[pause]*

Are you more focused on making sure that you are physically fit than you are on the health of your heart? *[pause]*

Do you put more effort into *looking* godly than you do in actually *being* godly? *[pauseeee]*

You see, we each can struggle with hypocrisy to some degree, and so we must make sure to remind ourselves, "What are the weightier, more important things? Am I ignoring them?" *[pauseeee]*

What it came down to is that the scribes and Pharisees focused on looking righteous, but were not inwardly righteous. *[pause]*

Jesus says in verse 25, "you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence." *[pauseeee]*

They focused on what they looked like, but not on who they were on the inside.

But as Jesus makes clear, we must clean the inside of the cup first and then the outside will be clean. *[pauseeee]*

This is why Jesus called them "white-washed tombs".

They looked good on the outside, but were dead and unclean underneath. *[pause]*

It's like if you tried to cover up rotten wood - it may look good, but it's not good. *[pauseeee]*

Focusing solely on what you look like to others is an easy trap to get entangled in.

We *like* to be seen as godly, so we tend to do things that clean up and beautify our outward appearance, which people more readily see.

And we want the attention and praise of people, but is it all just a covering for our ugly hearts? *[pauseeeee]*

There's a story of "Robert Redford walking one day through a hotel lobby. *[pause]*

A woman saw him and followed him to the elevator. *[pause]*

'Are you the real Robert Redford?' she asked him with great excitement. *[pause]*

As the doors of the elevator closed, he replied, 'Only when I am alone!'⁴ *[pauseeee]*

Sadly, that's like many of us, we aren't the real "us" until we are behind closed doors.

We like to appear one way, but *be* another. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus is showing us that we should not just cover up the symptoms, but go to the root. *[pause]*

If we have anger issues, we think that just avoiding anger-inducing situations will solve it, but we neglect our anger-producing heart. *[pause]*

If we have envy issues, we think that having that thing that we want will make the envy go away, but it just shows itself somewhere else because we didn't go to the root, the heart. *[pauseeee]*

When it comes to your sin, you must go to heart *and then* the outside will follow! *[pauseeeee]*

Growing up, there was a church culture of what I believe to be Pharisaical standards. *[pause]*

The emphasis was all on making sure your hair was cut a certain length, and no facial hair, that your dress was perfectly in line with the standards.

That you avoided this music or that thing, and there were rules after rules of this and that. *[pause]*

That's what the emphasis and stress was mainly on. *[pause]*

So what happened?

⁴ Original Source Unknown. <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/h/hypocrisy.htm>.

It created a lot of young people who looked good, and looked clean cut, and looked holy, but deep down, their hearts weren't touched. *[pause]*

Many of those same kids who met the standards and looked so good have now walked away from the faith all together. *[pause]*

What went wrong?!

The cup was cleaned on the outside, but not the inside.

The outward appearance was changed, but not the heart. *[pauseeee]*

Are you trying to do the same thing in your life? *[pause]*

Are you focused on the outward things only, and not focusing mainly on the heart? *[pauseeee]*

The third thing about a hypocrite found here is that...

III. A hypocrite convinces others to follow their ways, and leads them to ruin.

In verses 13-15, Jesus shares that these men would hinder people from entering the kingdom of heaven. *[pause]*

They would even go great lengths to make a convert, but by doing so, they would make them twice as much a child of hell then they were themselves.

Now *that's* a serious thing! *[pauseee]*

But how does this relate to hypocrisy?

It's because they appeared to be all about the things of God.

They would teach people and travel long distances to make proselytes, yet they were really just opposing God.

They looked spiritual, but they were sending people to Hell. *[pauseeeee]*

Now this is of course talking about unbelieving hypocrisy, not the hypocrisy that Christians can struggle with from time to time. *[pause]*

This is hypocrisy that is religious, yet Christless.

It's human religion that looks good, but it's ultimately opposed to God. *[pauseeee]*

We must remember that Christless religion is not positive nor even neutral.

Man-made religion can actually hinder and block people from turning to Christ. *[pause]*

By not trusting that Jesus is the only way, these scribes and Pharisees were shutting the kingdom of heaven in people's faces.

They were preventing people from turning to Christ, and thereby, making children of hell. *[pauseee]*

That's the thing with this kind of hypocrisy is that it looks religious and devout, but it's ultimately devoid of God. *[pauseee]*

Some people would say, "Look at them traveling across sea and land to make converts! Isn't that so good?"

But the question is, "What kind of convert are they making?" *[pauseee]*

Many people think that all religions are the same.

Or others think that as long as someone is devout, it doesn't matter what their beliefs are.

But that's wrong! *[pause]*

The scribes and Pharisees show us that a religion can even look close to Christianity and be devout, but without Christ, it's only making children of hell. *[pauseee]*

There is only one way to God the Father: through Jesus Christ alone.⁵

So any religion that doesn't put Christ alone as the way is simply hypocritical religion in that it looks God-focused, but it's God-opposing. *[pause]*

It looks holy, but it's ungodly.

What it appears to be is not what it actually is. *[pauseee]*

God is not fooled, nor does He overlook rebellion.

But as Jesus says in verses 38-39, "See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" *[pauseee]*

Israel had their chance to turn to Christ and because they refused, now judgment was coming.

So the Temple would be left desolate and even destroyed later on by the Romans in AD 70.

And they wouldn't see Him until He came again, and that's when they would ultimately realize that the Lord was truly in their midst. *[pauseee]*

Each and every person must realize and understand that to reject Christ is to reject life.

⁵ John 14:6.

It's to face judgment and condemnation, for it's only through Jesus that salvation can be found.
[pauseeee]

Do not take Jesus lightly!

To reject Christ is to be an enemy of God. [pauseeee]

Now for some people they see this as so mean to say or even imply, and they recoil at any notion of judgment or condemnation.

Yet it's not that Jesus condemned innocent people.

Rather, He's condemning those who rejected His gracious offer of salvation and life! [pause]

Just listen to the mercy and grace shared amidst all of this in verse 37...

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!

How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" [pauseeee]

Here is this city, Jerusalem, who wickedly kills the prophets and stones those who are graciously sent to them by God.

And Jesus says that it's that very city that He would have loved to gather together like a hen gathering her brood under her wings. [pauseeee]

You see Jesus' deep grief over rebellion.

You see His tenderness and compassion for sinners.

You see that He views them as chicks who helplessly need His protective care. [pauseeee]

He was willing to have them under His wings, but they would not, and that's why they are facing judgment.

They were not willing -- they refused Him. [pauseeee]

How incomprehensible! [pause]

Here was Jesus, the Savior of the world, calling out to them, yet they refused Him.

Here was Jesus, the One who alone can give life and salvation, yet they were unwilling to come.

Here was Jesus, who extended such grace and mercy to those who rebelled against Him, but still they resisted. [pauseeee]

This grieves the Savior's heart!

This is the same Savior, who wept over Jerusalem at another point.⁶ *[pauseeee]*

Yes, there is judgment for those who reject Christ, but it is not because Christ didn't graciously offer Himself to them. *[pauseeee]*

Everyone is under condemnation to begin with, but Jesus came in order to save those who would simply turn to Him in faith.⁷ *[pause]*

His grace and mercy are extended to sinners.

He has tenderness and compassion for them, and He is willing to take everyone under His wing, yet many still refuse.

They are not willing to turn to Jesus, and so they receive the due penalty for rejecting the Life-giver. *[pauseeee]*

Have *you* trusted in Jesus Christ alone, repenting of your sins and believing that He is the way to be forgiven and have eternal life? *[pause]*

Are you, through faith, under His protective wing? *[pauseeee]*

He is willing that all would come, but will you go? *[pause]*

Don't be led to ruin, nor lead others to ruin by turning away from the Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

It may look religious and devout, and may fool others with a cloak of man-made religion or self-styled spirituality, but without Christ, there's only the dreadful reality of judgment to come.

So trust in Christ alone, your only hope! *[pauseeee]*

This passage is a clear, direct, and powerful denunciation of hypocrisy in all its forms.

And it showed us this about hypocrites...

Hypocrites focus on the outward, external things and ignore the heart.

This passage showed us the sad and sorrowful state of the scribes and Pharisees.

They looked good and godly, but it was not good, nor godly underneath. *[pauseeee]*

Here's a very possible scenario, according to the truth found in this passage.....

You could be a person who comes to church every Sunday, all buttoned up and appears to have it all together. *[pause]*

⁶ A reference to Luke 19:41-44.

⁷ A reference to John 3:17-18.

You give money in the plate every week, volunteer to help out when asked, and are considered a godly person by many people. *[pause]*

You could easily repeat all the right answers, you have never been in trouble with the law, and never had a major scandal or publicly-seen moral failing. *[pause]*

You pride yourself in always voting conservative, put up Republican lawn signs all over the place, and even post on social media regularly, trumpeting traditional values. *[pause]*

Yet inwardly you could be dead, full of greed, lust, anger, and self-indulgence, for the grace of Christ has never changed your life.

And Jesus would say of you, “Woe to you, hypocrite! White-washed tomb!

You outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and self-indulgence.” *[pause]*

What a disaster that would be! What a sad and tragic thing! *[pauseeee]*

You see, it’s easy to point the finger at these scribes and Pharisees, but I wonder if anything they did shows up in our lives?

Because how tragic would it be if we looked down on them, while we did the same sort of things? *[pauseeee]*

Could it be that our picture-perfect social media pages are like cleaning the outside of the cup, while ignoring and hiding the dirty inside of the cup? *[pause]*

Could it be that our clean-cut, well-dressed, put together act that we have on Sunday’s is just white-washing our tombs in front of others? *[pauseeee]*

Let’s discard all of that.

I say to all of us, me included: enough with the fake facades, godly shows, and attention-seeking good deeds. *[pause]*

Remember that God cares about our hearts!

So let’s put more effort into the most important and inward things than we do about just beautifying the external things and obsessing over the small things. *[pauseeee]*

We need God’s help for this!

So go to Him for aid, strength, help, and grace.

Go humbly to Christ and ask Him to help you, and He will gather you under His wings and show you untold mercy and grace.