

Episode #9-08 Matthew 23 Part 3-Acts of the Hypocrites

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord was having a final, conclusive confrontation with the corrupt, religious leaders of Israel in Jerusalem. He is in the process of pronouncing eight woes against the terrible hypocrisy of the liars and deceivers, the scribes and Pharisees. These woes contrast with the eight beatitudes of Matthew 5. He is in the midst of the fourth woe, condemning them as blind guides because of their teaching about swearing.

III. The Woes on the Scribes and Pharisees. Matthew 23:13-32.

A. Verse 22. To swear by heaven is to swear by God. This is proof that “heaven” is a way of referring to God. In Matthew 5:33-37 the Lord warned against this kind of swearing. Very flowery oaths were prominent in the life of Israel at this time, but they really revealed a penchant for trickery that was not honoring to God.

1. A throne is a seat of government, not a fancy chair. God’s seat of government is in the heavens, Psalm 103:19. To swear by heaven is to swear by God’s government and by God Who “sits on” and therefore owns the government.
2. Contrast this with the fourth beatitude: blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled (Matthew 5:6). How little did one who swore up and down to do something, and then who said, “Ha, ha, I swore by the wrong thing, so I don’t have to do it”; I say, how little did such a person care about righteousness? God did not count their oaths null and void as they did, and they would be charged as oath-breakers before His court, however corrupt the courts of their land might have been.

B. Verse 23. “Tithe” is actually an old English word that meant a “tenth.” Bullinger says a district containing ten families was called a tithing. There is nothing sacred about this word “tithe”; we could just make it “tenth.”

1. The Jews would scatter mint on the floors of their houses and synagogues for the scent it gave.
2. “Anise” might mean dill, a spice and a medicine.
3. “Cummin” or fennel. A cultivated plant in Israel whose seeds are used for flavor.
4. Realize that seasonings are not a food, but are used in small amounts. One might raise seasonings in a small box outside the back door. To give a tithe of these would be to give a truly miniscule amount.
5. Notice the figure of speech “Many Ands” or polysyndeton; it means that each element in the list is of equal importance with every other element. Notice it in the list of three plants and in the list of three weightier matters.
6. “Judgment” has to do with setting things in proper order. Things were in sad shape in Israel, but the scribes and Pharisees were more worried about tithing herbs than about setting things right!
7. Mercy is important to God, but to them strictness was far more essential.
8. “Faith” or belief, Greek *pistis*. This is always a key factor with God.
9. “You ought” or it was necessary for you to have done.

10. They were under the law of the tithe, and the Lord was not going to rebuke them for being scrupulous in it. Yet they had no place for what He considered the weightier matters of the law they were under! So what good was their keeping the tithe so carefully, then?
- C. Verse 24. He called them “blind guides” before back in verse 16.
1. The gnat is said to be a wine-gnat or midge bred in fermenting and evaporating wine.
 2. The camel is an extreme, meant to be humorous, and it shows the ridiculousness of the Pharisees.
 3. Contrast this with the fifth beatitude: blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7). These religious leaders were not concerned with mercy, but with straining out gnats, and tithing miniscule amounts of herbs.
- D. Verse 25. The dish is especially a platter on which delicacies are served. Bullinger calls it a “side dish.” How many meals would you be willing to eat in a restaurant that washed the outside of the cups and plates, but not the inside?
- E. Verse 26. This time He just calls them blind, rather than fools and blind.
1. “First” is the Greek *proton*, first in order, but also of first importance.
 2. If one wishes to look good outwardly, the best thing is to be good inwardly, and then the outside will follow as a matter of course. Yet it is ever the way of the hypocrites to make the outside look good while leaving the inside unclean and full of robbery and excess.
 3. Contrast this with the sixth beatitude: blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8). Yet these religious leaders were not pure in heart, but only washed on the outside and impure inside. How could they ever hope to see God, then?
- F. Verse 27. Bullinger in *The Companion Bible* says that sepulchers were whitened a month before the Passover, to warn off persons from contracting uncleanness. “Appear” is the Greek *phaino*, meaning to “shine forth as.”

IV. Conclusion: The Lord condemned the scribes and Pharisees for their acting which hid their true, selfish, corrupt motivations. He condemned their deceptive swearing that got them out of keeping their word. He condemned their careful tithing of herbs while ignoring justice and mercy and faith. He condemned their cleaning of the outside while corruption remains inside. He condemned them as whitewashed tombs that look good outwardly but inwardly are full of all uncleanness. Finally, He condemned their building of tombs for the prophets and the righteous of the past while they are the true sons of their fathers shown by hating the righteous and prophets of their own generation. What sad cases these men were! May we never be like the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees.