

LIFEPOINT CHURCH // WORD TO LIFE

THE WAY



MATTHEW 22:41 - 23:39
WEEKS 21-23



Word to Life studies are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

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WORD TO LIFE

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Week 21: Matthew 22:41-46

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 22:41-46

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 22:41-46 and complete the activities and questions below.

Activity: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

Question: Why do you think that Jesus goes on the offensive with His questions?

Question: Why do you think Jesus asks whose son the Messiah is?

Question: Why is the Messiah considered to be the son of David?

Question: What does Jesus' phrase "in the Spirit" tell us about how He viewed David's writings and the Old Testament?

Question: Who is the first "Lord" and who is the second "Lord"?

Question: What does verse 44 communicate about Jesus' status in heaven?

Activity: Read Psalm 110 and make observations below.

Question: Why do you think that those around Jesus were afraid to ask Him questions after His question?

Week 21: Matthew 22:41-46

Day 2: No More Questions

READ: Matthew 22:41-46

EXPLORE:

We Americans love our law enforcement TV dramas. I did a quick scan through the show lineup for NBC, ABC and CBS this week, and 70% of the scripted primetime shows were some sort of law enforcement drama. Inevitably there is a point in almost every one of them where the investigators bring their prime suspect into that sterile room with the metal chairs and the one-way mirror for the interrogation to begin. Imagine everyone's shock if the prime suspect started asking all the questions?

Prior to Matthew 22:41, the Pharisees and Sadducees have been doing all the interrogating. Up until this point in Matthew, the Greek word *eperōtaō*, translated by the ESV as "ask", has been used five times, including by the Pharisee lawyer in the passage last week. *Sidenote: I need to pitch a Pharisee lawyer legal drama to the networks.* This word, *eperōtaō*, has more of a demanding tone of interrogation than we would typically associate with the English word *ask*, and up until this point, Matthew has reserved it for these more demanding inquiries by the Jewish leaders and disciples (12:10, 16:1, 17:10, 22:23, 22:35). Usually when someone was genuinely asking to learn something from Jesus or when the Pharisees were pretending to want to learn something from Jesus, Matthew uses the Greek word *legō*, which involves more of a teaching discourse both for asking and answering questions. Keep in mind these Greek words for *ask* were used differently in Mark and Luke's Gospels. Matthew 22:41 is the first and last time that Matthew records Jesus using the *eperōtaō* sort of asking. Why did Jesus choose this moment to flip the roles, and become the interrogator? We are not told exactly why. Prior to this, Jesus' responses to the questions of the Jewish leaders had been constructed to share truth about God's kingdom while

avoiding the traps that would have led to His arrest before the appointed time. Now that He was approaching the appointed time for His arrest and death, it was time to go on the offensive. What is clear is that Jesus was done with being interrogated. In His godly wisdom, He not only constructed this conversation in a way that left this group of Pharisees speechless but also made it so they never asked Him any more questions (Matt 22:46). It was time for them to listen and that's what they did as Jesus begins His final uninterrupted judgment upon the scribes and Pharisees.

How are you and I supposed to handle these types of situations when we are trying to share the gospel to others or disciple fellow believers? Are we supposed to ask tough questions or are we supposed to just listen and answer them? Are we supposed to ask our questions in a way that leads to lengthy conversations and discovery or ask direct questions that force the issue at hand. The answer to all of those questions is 'yes'. As to which approach we should take in any conversation, we should be guided by prayer and the Holy Spirit.

BIG IDEA: Different types and tones of questioning and conversation are appropriate as long as your heart is aligned with Jesus.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Memorize Colossians 4:3-6 "At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."

Week 21: Matthew 22:41-46

Day 3: The Songbook of Jesus

READ: Matthew 22:41-46

EXPLORE:

Of the 150 Psalms, 72 (or 73) of them have David as their author. In fact, the ascription of these psalms, 'A Psalm Of David', are testified by Jesus Himself as being divinely inspired (Matthew 22:43,45). In fact, the most famous of the Psalms (Psalms 22, 23, 32, 51, and 110) are all from the quill of David. It is no wonder that David was known as the 'Sweet Psalmist of Israel' (2 Sam. 23:1) in a passage thought to be his last words (in poetic form). In fact, much of the Psalms reflect the trajectory of the life of David: he labors in obscurity, is persecuted by the authorities, suffers in ignominy, is finally vindicated and is exalted. And we see the same trajectory in the greater son of David. Knowing that Matthew begins his book with the title 'Son of David', it is not surprising that the words of David are in Jesus' mind when He turns the tables on the Pharisees by examining them.

The Psalms are arranged very intentionally. They are organized into 5 books, mirroring the five books of the Torah (1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150), each book ending in a Psalm of praise. Martin Luther used to call the Book of Psalms "a little Bible."

This was Jesus' songbook. You might be surprised to know that the Psalms are the most quoted book in the NT, and Psalm 110, found in our passage, is the most quoted OT passage in the NT. The Psalms were often found on Jesus' lips and He used them to frame His ministry and His death and resurrection. From Psalm 22 we read: 'My God, my God why have you forsaken me... they divided my garments and cast lots for my clothing... they pierced my hands and feet ... He trusts in God, let Him deliver Him'; from Psalm 31, 'into your hands I commit my spirit'; from Psalm 69 we

read, 'My throat is parched...for my thirst they gave me sour wine'.

Much of the liturgy in the Temple and the synagogues revolved around the Psalms. During the Feasts of Passover and Booths, when the Jews would gather in Jerusalem, the pilgrims would sing the Psalms (of Ascent) as they ascended toward Jerusalem. During the Passover, the liturgy would include singing the Hallel (Psalms 113-118), and Jesus and His disciples would likely have sung the final part of the Hallel prior to their departure to the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:26).

What we find in the Psalms are the saints' cries of praise, anguish and cries for vindication and longing. Above all, we find the words that our Lord used to frame His emotion, His longing, His ministry and His cries to His heavenly Father. This is the place to which He retreated to at those key points in His life.

When you and I open the book of Psalms, we find words we can also use to express our joys, sorrows, triumphs, and travails. And we find our Lord Jesus in them, for He found Himself in them.

Throughout His ministry and particularly in the last weeks of His life, the book of Psalms was on His mind and on His lips. We need to be familiar with it if we want to better understand His Person and Work.

BIG IDEA: The book of Psalms was Jesus' songbook and the place He went to in order to frame His ministry and His calling.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Make it a point to read and meditate on the Psalms throughout the year.

Week 21: Matthew 22:41-46

Day 4: Two Lords?

READ: Matthew 22:41-46; Psalm 110

EXPLORE:

By itself, Matthew 22:41-46 is a confusing passage that appears to have no connection to anything surrounding it. However, in order to fully grasp Jesus' logic it is necessary to look at the preceding events, starting in Matthew 21:23. Beginning in this verse, the Pharisees and other religious leaders question the source of Jesus' authority. After they fail to trap Jesus into committing blasphemy, Jesus speaks to them in a series of three parables where He confronts the religious leaders' failure to lead the people well. He uses the parables to speak to how the lowest in society, not the current privileged, powerful people, will be allowed to enter the kingdom of God. The Pharisees and Sadducees then respond by posing three questions in a continued attempt to trap and confuse Jesus' words. However, with each question, Jesus responds in a manner which amazes, astonishes, and ultimately silences both the religious leaders and the crowds listening. With this context in mind, the section of three consecutive questions from the Pharisees and Sadducees is concluded with one final challenge from Jesus in Matthew 22:41-46. This challenge comes in the form of a question where Jesus asks them what they think about Christ and whose son they believe him to be. In keeping with tradition, the Pharisees answered, "the Son of David," expecting Jesus to agree with it. However, Jesus pushes them further by asking why David, through the Spirit, called him "Lord" in Psalm 110:1. The implication behind the question is the traditional understanding and interpretation of the identity of the Messiah. While the Pharisees' response was correct, it did not fully recognize that the Messiah is in fact more than David's son; he is David's Lord.

The use of Psalm 110:1 by Jesus is no accident. For hundreds of years, Psalm 110 has widely been understood as a messianic psalm because it depicts a ruler who will one day come to deliver his people and judge his enemies all while sitting at the right hand of the LORD God. While there has been debate throughout the years on the legitimacy of this interpretation, it is clear from Jesus' use of the psalm here in Matthew 22:44 that he identifies himself in the psalm. Jesus' argument and interpretation is rooted in David's authorship of the psalm. For David, to write about how there is a "Lord" who is between the LORD God and himself, allows Jesus' argument to the Pharisees to stand when he identifies himself as the coming Messiah who is more than David's son. Matthew 22:41–46 concludes a lengthy exchange between Jesus and the religious leaders. From the beginning of their back and forth, Jesus consistently responded to the Pharisees and Sadducees' questions as they tried to lure him into a trap. In this passage, Jesus challenges them to recognize that he is the Messiah and the 'Lord' David wrote about in Psalm 110:1. In this position, Jesus has supremacy over all things as is seen throughout Psalm 110. Both Psalm and Matthew 22:41–46 are reminders for us today that Jesus is in authority at the right hand of God the Father where he is ruling over all things—even when it seems like He is not.

BIG IDEA: Jesus' identity is more than just the Son of David; He is the Messiah who is ruling and reigning at the right hand of God the Father.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How does this passage inform your understanding of who Christ is?
- **Challenge:** Consider the supremacy of Christ and how knowing it can impact your daily life.

Week 21: Matthew 22:41-46

Day 5: The Silence of Fear

READ: Matthew 22:41-46

EXPLORE:

This passage may cause us to do a double take as we realize Jesus asks a question instead of the Pharisees. His question is this: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” The Pharisees are quick to answer confidently, but Jesus presses even deeper, exposing a reality that they cannot refute: He is the Messiah. The Pharisees are then left speechless. Their silence, however, is not a sign of respect, reverence, or even surrender. Instead, they recoil in fear. Their mouths were shut because to answer Jesus’ question rightly would mean to surrender their rebellion, their reputation, and their influence. They feared men rather than God.

This is the subtle danger of the fear of man: it can result in calculated silence. The fear of man can cause us to cowardly shrink back in times when truth demands a response. The Pharisees stood face-to-face with Jesus, Truth Himself, but chose the comfort of their pride over the glorious discomfort of truth. What does truth do? It pushes back the lies of darkness. Jesus’ question demanded a response to shine a light on the truth of who He is, but the Pharisees feared the changes that truth would bring into their lives.

How often do we, too, allow ourselves to be silent, unmoved, and unchanged due to our fear of the opinion of others or the consequences of obedience? Proverbs 29:25 states, “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.” We think making everyone else happy, staying safe in our bubble of normalcy, or being all things to all people will result in good things, but it is a trap. The only One we should seek to please is God. John 5:41-42, 44 states, “I do not receive glory from people.

But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. ... How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" How can we claim to walk with the Lord when we value something else above Him?

What is the alternative to fear of man? Fear of God. Isaiah 8:12-14 says, "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary." When God is your first authority, when God is the One you fear disappointing, when God is the One you love more than all else, you find sanctuary in Him. He energizes us to follow Him and to speak up against the powers of darkness in this world. He equips us and sustains us to be moved, changed, and active in our fight against sin and evil. He gives us rest from our toil and comfort in our struggles. We must stand on truth regardless of the sacrifices involved.

BIG IDEA: When confronted by truth, the fear of man will paralyze and silence us—but the fear of God will bring transformation and action.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Where in your life are you choosing silence to protect your reputation, comfort, or approval from others—when Jesus is calling you to respond in truth and obedience?

Week 22: Matthew 23:1-36

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 23:1-36

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 23:1-36 and complete the activities and questions below.

Activity: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

Question: What does it mean that the scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat?

Activity: Think and write down examples of positions of authority where hypocrisy can have damaging effects on those under their influence.

Question: What does Jesus mean when He tells the crowds not to seek the titles "Rabbi" or "Teacher"? What does He mean by call no man your "father"?

Question: In what ways did the scribes and Pharisees shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces?

Question: Why do you think the Pharisees and scribes were swearing by different objects?

Question: Why does Jesus accuse the Pharisees and scribes of being the same as those who murdered the prophets if they themselves claim to take the side of their fathers?

Question: Why do you think Jesus referenced Abel and Zechariah the son of Barachiah specifically?

Week 22: Matthew 23:1-36

Day 2: The Warning and Rebuke of Christ

READ: Matthew 23:1-36

EXPLORE:

“Woe” is a strange word. It’s not one that we use often in our everyday language, and it’s usually used in Shakespeare plays. However, this is a serious word that Jesus uses in this passage. “Woe” has a rich Biblical usage, and can be used for deep laments, personal anguish, and prophetic warnings. In our passage today, Jesus uses woe as a warning and as a rebuke.

The way Jesus uses this word is like a parent’s final warning. He says woe to the scribes and Pharisees to catch their attention. This word’s usage in the Old Testament primarily is used around the prophets. Woe is an interjection that usually preceded a call to repent and turn from great and dire sin. When Jesus says woe, He says it with gravity. It’s not a light word, or a silly interjection. It precedes harsh warnings and promises of destruction. To the Pharisees, who are well versed in Scripture and have lots of head knowledge about the Bible, this is like a grenade pin dropping in a silent room. Every “woe” Jesus exclaims to them is followed by harsh and revealing condemnations.

The word “woe” is a warning, but it is also a rebuke. Jesus uses this word to call out false oaths, neglect of the law, and other heavy topics. The scribes and Pharisees are not being rebuked for small mistakes, instead they are being called out for deep-rooted and unrepentant sins. Christ is rebuking them to follow after the God they claim to serve, and He reminds them of the terrible consequences God gave to Israel for their unrepentance.

The warning and rebukes of Christ do not receive the weight and repentance that they deserve. As Christians, the warnings of Christ ought to capture our attention. So often we can get

wrapped in our ways and what we are doing that we can miss what God is telling us. Our lives and our hearts should not be cold to the warnings of Christ. The beauty of our walk with Him is that we are able to talk to God through prayer and listen to His voice in the Bible. When we read such warnings in Scripture, we should be careful to avoid the behavior being condemned. Not only eager to hear the warnings, but also eager to be molded by God. Our hearts should not remain unrepentant in the light of our sin being revealed.

BIG IDEA: Woe is a word often used around warnings and rebukes. As Christians, we ought to heed the warnings and rebukes of Christ, and be moldable when our sin is revealed.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How can you heed the warnings of God better?
- **Pray:** Do you find yourself being unrepentant to God's warnings? Pray that you and others would be repentant when God reveals your sin.

Week 22: Matthew 23:1-36

Day 3: Do As They Say, Not As They Do!

READ: Matthew 23:1-36; Hebrews 4:12-13

EXPLORE:

At some point in the Christian walk, you will likely be disappointed to find that a pastor, speaker, ministry leader, or even a Christian influencer that you respect will be caught in very disappointing sin. I remember when I heard about the pattern of sexual sin that a late apologist that I had learned a lot from came into the light. It was discouraging and disheartening—could I trust any of the things I had learned from him? How can someone whose life looks more hypocritical than authentically repentant and following God still share the truth? (Of course—I want to jump in here and say no one is ever too far from receiving God’s grace!) This passage speaks more to these questions.

The “chair of Moses” that Jesus describes the scribes and Pharisees sitting on indicates that as they taught the Old Testament, they were representatives of Moses. Centuries later, synagogues would refer to the teacher’s seat as “Moses’ seat”. In the context of the modern church, I think we can consider those on “Moses’ chair” to be pastors and spiritual leaders who teach the Word of God.

Throughout this passage, Jesus highlights the hypocrisy of the spiritual leaders. He calls them whitewashed tombs to indicate that while they look pious and righteous on the outside, their inward hearts showed spiritual defilement. They missed the big picture of following Jesus as Lord and exhibiting qualities of a heart changed by Him—faithfulness, justice, and mercy. Through their obsessions over small rituals and being seen as awesome, honored, and holy, they missed the big “camel” things!

But here is the really cool thing—Jesus tells us not to ignore the truth of God’s Word that was still able to be spoken through the mouths of these hypocritical leaders. He says to do what they teach you, but not what they do—since they didn’t practice the things they taught. How can this be? Well, see Hebrews 4:12-13. The Word of God is powerful—it is a living Word! It reaches our core and changes us! So, even if one day we find that a spiritual leader who we have loved and have learned the Word of God from has been living a life of hypocrisy contrary to what they teach—this doesn’t invalidate the truth and life changing power of God’s Word!

BIG IDEA: God’s Word is perfect and inerrant, and is not invalidated when spoken by people living hypocritical lives.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Have you found yourself disappointed to learn about the hypocrisy of a spiritual leader? How did you respond? How should we respond?
- **Challenge:** Take a moment to pray for spiritual leaders to continue to live authentic lives practicing what they preach.

Week 22: Matthew 23:1-36

Day 4: Twice as Bad?

READ: Matthew 23:15

EXPLORE:

“The student has now become the master.” This is a very common expression that people use to describe how with much learning and training a student can actually outdo their teacher. This can be seen in many different areas of study: Mathematics, Martial Arts, Music, Business, Sports, Law, etc. It is common and even expected for a student to eventually be better than the teacher, but what if their teacher has been leading them astray the whole time? That is the case with the Pharisees and their students.

One of the woes given to the Pharisees and scribes is that when they train up others to be like themselves, they are not getting them closer to heaven and God but actually pushing them farther away than even they are. How can that be the case? The commentator Leon Morris makes a good case that the reason they are *twice as much a son of hell* is due to the fact that their students are only susceptible to their interpretation of the Scriptures. The Pharisees are familiar with different schools of Jewish thought, but their camp emphasized *Pharisaism* with their interpretations but also in their actions and the way in which they live out their “faith”.

Jesus’ go-to name for the Pharisees was hypocrites. The Greek word for hypocrite could also be translated as actor. They were actors who put on a show for others but were different people at home. They lived as actors pretending to meet all the requirements of the law and letting everyone know that they did. They met the requirements and everyone else failed to meet them. But of course they did not follow all the law, not even close. And in fact they often would keep the easiest parts of the law and

neglect the more difficult parts of the law. So imagine learning from these people.

Imagine learning that showing that you keep the law is far more important than actually keeping the law. Imagine learning to make others feel bad for not being as righteous as you are. Imagine learning from those who are blind to what God's Word is saying even though they read it constantly. How would you turn out?

Chances are that if you were taught by the Pharisees and stuck around that your heart would be massively calloused. Chances are that you would learn to out-act your teachers. Chances are that you would be even farther away from God than your teachers. This verse should not only warn us about the dangers of Pharisaism but also warn us about the dangers of bad teachers. The best way to counter bad teachers is to raise up good ones. Christians should be known for outdoing one another in love and good works not for acting religious and being judgmental.

But what is your focus in your walk with the Lord? Are you being disciplined by someone who bears the fruits of the Spirit well? Are you praying for the raising up of teachers that can lead others in a God-honoring way? Evil will be duplicated but with the Lord's help good can also be duplicated. Let us pray that good prevails around us!

BIG IDEA: Pharisees made disciples that were worse than themselves; pray for disciple-makers that make disciples that outdo them in love and good works.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Meet with a brother or sister in Christ today and seek to push them closer to God.

Week 22: Matthew 23:1-36

Day 5: Dirty Dishes and Whitewashed Tombs

READ: Matt 23:25-28; Acts 23:3; 1 Samuel 16:7; Ezekiel 13:10-14

EXPLORE:

Two of the seven woes in Matthew 23 really put the mirror up for the scribes, Pharisees...and quite likely the readers of this passage! ²⁵ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.* ²⁶ *You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.”* Have you ever gone to the kitchen cabinet, grabbed one of your favorite cups or mugs, glanced down into it...and see residual food stuck on the inside? Ewww! It seems like it’s always an old spaghetti noodle or ramen or something too. By all accounts, the outside of the dish appeared to be clean...but the inside...the part that really matters...was germ-ridden filth. I’m sad to say that—on more than one occasion—I have grabbed a “clean” steak knife out of the wood block that sits on the counter, only to find old peanut butter still on it from whichever one of our 4 kids used it before. Lovely, huh? Now, in fairness, peanut butter is tough to clean off, but come on! Rinse it off, already! A cup, mug, bowl, knife, or utensil that is clean on the outside but dirty on the inside—is, well, just about worthless for its intended purpose. Can you imagine showing up to work, school, or church like you’ve got it all together...but in reality, a filthy dirty wretch on the inside? Pausing for dramatic effect...²⁷ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.* ²⁸ *So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”* It may be difficult to imagine for us today, but in Jesus’ time, it was common to paint lime to the outside of a grave or tomb to ‘whitewash’ them—especially before festival seasons. This would make them look clean on the outside, even though they were obviously full of

dead bones on the inside. When Jesus said this to the religious leaders, they would have likely been quite offended, as you would be considered unclean for 7 days if you touched the body of a dead person, and not permitted to step foot in the temple...which was the place that they most wanted to be noticed. Jesus used several opportunities during his earthly ministry to point out how the religious leaders of the day were more interested in external credentials than internal character. He often referred to them as stage actors (hypocrites) pretending to be something they were not. Did the Pharisees recognize that they were being hypocritical? Did they come to realize that they were often just acting out a checklist religion? Tough to say. We know that they most certainly didn't appreciate Jesus bringing it to their attention. What about today? Have 'religious leaders' let go of works-based ideologies, or flowing robes of distinction? What about us, plain old church members? Are we walking the walk? Are we clean on the outside for one day a week, but filthy the other six days? 1 Samuel 16:7, reminds us that "the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

BIG IDEA: If we spend time in the Word and in prayer, God can clean us from the inside out.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what ways have you struggled with a mismatch between your public image versus your inner reality?
- **Challenge:** "Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out." (Proverbs 10:9). If you struggle with this in your life, pray Psalm 25:21 "May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you."

Week 23: Matthew 23:37-39

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 23:37-39

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 23:37-39 and complete the activities and questions below.

Activity: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

Question: Why do you think Jesus shifts from the Pharisees and scribes to Jerusalem?

Questions: Why do you think Jesus uses the analogy of a hen's care for her chicks? What is He conveying?

Question: What is stopping Jerusalem from accepting Jesus?

Question: What does Jesus mean when He says that their house “is left...desolate?”

Question: Why does Jesus say they will not see Him again until a later time?

Question: When does/will Jerusalem say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”?

Activity: Read Psalm 118 and write down your thoughts on why Jesus quoted this Psalm.

Question: What does this passage teach you about the heart of Jesus?

Week 23: Matthew 23:37-39

Day 2: Consistent Mercy

READ: Matthew 23:37-39

EXPLORE:

What is the point of prophecy? When most people think of prophecy they believe it is a prediction of the future that is certain to take place. The vast majority of prophecy in the Old Testament is actually to get Israel or the nations to repent NOT to let them know that there is no hope for them. This means that the majority of prophecies are conditional and warnings. On the flip side there are also many prophecies that are contingent on obedience rather than everlasting covenants. A few Scriptures show this in the Old Testament.

“If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it” (Jeremiah 18:7-10). Jeremiah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is setting a framework for the way God deals with nations. God often throughout the Old Testament says that He will pour out His wrath on a nation, but due to this verse we know that He is always willing to forgive if that nation repents. He does the same for individuals.

“But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?”

(Ezekiel 18:21-23). God is merciful to groups as well as individuals even to the last second. Even if He has already declared their destruction. Two quick narrative examples are Nineveh and Hezekiah. Jonah declares, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" But because they repented, the Lord showed mercy even though Jonah was angered. The Lord said to Hezekiah "for you shall die," but then Hezekiah prayed and "wept bitterly." The Lord then gave Hezekiah fifteen more years of life because of it. So, why does this matter for our passage?

Jerusalem was the city that represented all of Israel. The prophets time and time again were raised up to command the kings, the priests, and the people to turn back to the Lord and stop their abominations. However, they failed to obey. They failed to listen. God pronounced judgment on them, God brought judgment on them, God restored the city, but they still rejected Him. They killed the messengers that God sent to them, so Jesus finally pronounces a final judgment on them, "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!" Knowing that God is so merciful and forgives the repentant, the nation of Israel still rejected the Lord to the point that He turned to the Gentiles who accepted Christ. But even today there is still hope for the nation (Romans 11:11). Just like there is still hope for any individual who rejects God and ignores His future wrath on the wicked. Because of this we praise God for His mercy and point others to that mercy, lest they experience His wrath.

BIG IDEA: Jerusalem failed to repent but there is still hope for all the living whether that be nations or individuals.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Why do you think God forgives those who deserve judgment?

Week 23: Matthew 23:37-39

Day 3: In the Shadows of the Wings of God

READ: Psalm 36; Matthew 23:37-39

EXPLORE:

This week we will discuss the metaphor of God as a hen gathering chicks under her wings. Jesus says in Matthew 23:37, *“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!”* The imagery of Israel taking shelter in the shadow of the wings of the Lord is seen throughout the Psalms. Psalm 36:7 says, *“How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.”* Similar references can be found in Psalm 17:8, 57:1, 61:4, 63:7, and 91:1. The image presented is clear, if we submit to the Lord and follow Him we will have His protection and comfort with us, for the Scriptures are full of assurances for believers and as we develop a personal relationship with our Savior we deepen our trust in His word.

Consider Psalm 23:4, *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”* As we follow after Jesus and walk in the works planned for us, we develop a deeper trust and faith in the Lord. The rod and the staff that we once resented as they provided chastisement to us as we began the process of sanctification, now become a comfort. As we develop trust in God we see that His correction in our lives is for His glory and our good. Therefore, we should take refuge in the shadow of the wings of the Lord. Heeding His word, called to repentance by the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

When we see the lament in Matthew 23:37-39 we should also consider the words of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel 18:30-32 says,

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.” Rejoice if you have been given a new heart and the Holy Spirit dwells within you, and if you are still struggling with faith, reach out to God. James 1:5 says, *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him.”*

But, you should be prepared to live in the shadows of the Lord’s wings when he gives you wisdom, which requires repentance and sanctification.

BIG IDEA: Live under the Lord’s Wings.

APPLY:

- **Question:** We briefly discussed the metaphor of the hen in Matthew 23, what are some other common metaphors for God and how do they inform you about God’s character?
- **Question:** Do you feel comfort from God like the comfort discussed today? Why or why not?

Week 23: Matthew 23:37-39

Day 4: The Will of God

READ: Matthew 23:37-39

EXPLORE:

Does the Lord get whatever He wants? What an interesting question that theologians have been debating for millennia. The answer seems easy upon first glance. The Psalmist declares after all, "Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps." Must be an open and shut case then! Not so fast. Jesus declares in our short passage for this week that He wanted to gather up the children of Jerusalem but that did not take place. Why not? This gets into a larger discussion about the will of God. There are two main answers to this question, but many will choose to provide a nuanced answer that mixes the two answers.

The first answer is that God has a hierarchy of wills. Some have defined these wills as a decretive will and an expressed will. The difference is best explained through a particular reading of God's relationship with Pharaoh in the Old Testament. There are times when Pharaoh is said to harden his own heart (Exodus 8:15) but there are also times when God hardens Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 9:12). It makes sense that Pharaoh would harden his own heart, but why would God harden Pharaoh's heart? Hence, why theologians have come up with the idea of a hierarchy of wills. God's desire is to have His people set free from Egypt, that is His expressed will. He has stated that this is His purpose for His people. And yet His decretive will is found in Exodus 9:16 "for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." So, then you have two wills potentially at odds with each other. The will to release the people immediately upon Moses' first demand and the will to make the Lord's name great among the world through the plagues which could only come about through his constant refusal. How

does this apply to our passage? This applies to our passage because while God wants Jerusalem to come to Him (expressed will), He wants even more than that some greater purpose. Some greater purpose might be to show His wrath, or possibly to show that He is impartial to any specific group. Whatever the case, that's the first way of handling this passage.

The second way is that the reason God does not gather Jerusalem's children is because He genuinely allows humans to determine their relationship with Him. God has a genuine desire for Israel's salvation but has always declared that salvation can only be through the individual's or nation's repentance. God does not coerce human response but seeks to draw people through His Word, His Spirit, and His providential work. This matters not just for Israel but the world, because God often seemingly declares that He wants everyone to be saved (Ezekiel 18:32; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). The reason everyone is not saved is not because God has conflicting wills but because humans reject Him and He allows them to stay in that rejection (2 Thessalonians 2:10; Acts 13:46).

Which view is correct? Christians have only been arguing this for 1600 years so clearly, it's not obvious! One thing both camps agree on is that God is both loving and just and does not owe anything to anybody.

BIG IDEA: God is loving and just, but those categories are defined differently according to two different camps.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Which view do you think more aligns with Scripture and why?

Week 23: Matthew 23:37-39

Day 5: The Stubbornness of Man

READ: Matthew 23:37-39

EXPLORE:

How many people do you know that you would say are stubborn? People who don't like to admit they are wrong or like to dig their heels in on something that is very inconsequential? Realistically we all tend to be stubborn. Some of us may be stubborn when it comes to our opinions on sports, politics, people, cars, movies, brands, stores, food, you name it. For others of us we might be stubborn when it comes to defending ourselves when we know we are in the wrong. "Why were you late?" "Because of traffic." "So, it wasn't because you lost track of time?" "Nope." The worst kind of stubbornness is stubbornness toward God. This is the kind of stubbornness the Jewish leaders were guilty of. The question I have for us today is what will that stubbornness lead to in the end?

Christians have offered several views on what stubbornness will lead to when it is faced with the wrath of God. Either God will compel those who are stubborn to proclaim His glory or they will be sent to hell to remain in their stubbornness forever. This relates to our text because there is a debate on what the correct interpretation of Jesus' words in Matthew 23:39, "you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Is Jesus inferring that they will eventually see Him again when they say those words or will they never see Jesus again because they will refuse to say those words? Or possibly the phrase was open-ended and Jesus was leaving the door open for either possibility. Oh, the joys of deciding between possible views!

Will Jerusalem remain stubborn to the end or will they repent? Will they say "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," or will they be allowed to reject it. In Philippians, Paul says that

“Therefore God has exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

This verse seems to indicate that in some way everyone will declare Jesus is Lord. But how will this be possible if there are so many who stubbornly reject Him?? A possible theory is that when anyone beholds the risen Jesus Christ in all of His glory they can't help but proclaim Him as Lord. In the same way even the demons recognized Jesus for who He was in the Gospels. The demons called Jesus the Son of God, and they recognized His ability to bring down punishment upon them. They said this because they knew the power of Jesus in a way that no one else understood. They knew who He was and His power because they saw Him before He had even become incarnate. No one can deny the lightning's power after watching it strike. One way or another everyone will see the power of Jesus, whether that be in His good graces or under His judgment.

Paul holds out hope that even Israel itself will turn back in the end. “And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.” Let us pray for all those who are stubborn to repent and seek the Lord's forgiveness!

BIG IDEA: Human stubbornness may resist Jesus Christ now, but eventually every knee will bow before Him.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What do you think is the best way to reach someone who is stubborn?



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