

**25<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

**Isaiah 56:9-12**

### **God's Accusation Against the Wicked**

<sup>9</sup> Come, all you beasts of the field,  
come and devour, all you beasts of the forest!

<sup>10</sup> Israel's watchmen are blind,  
they all lack knowledge;  
they are all mute dogs,  
they cannot bark;  
they lie around and dream,  
they love to sleep.

<sup>11</sup> They are dogs with mighty appetites;  
they never have enough.  
They are shepherds who lack understanding;  
they all turn to their own way,  
they seek their own gain.

<sup>12</sup> "Come," each one cries, "let me get wine!  
Let us drink our fill of beer!  
And tomorrow will be like today,  
or even far better."

**Matthew 23:13-39**

### **Seven Woes on the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees**

<sup>13</sup> "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. [<sup>14</sup>]

<sup>15</sup> "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

<sup>16</sup> "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that

oath.’ <sup>17</sup> You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? <sup>18</sup> You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’ <sup>19</sup> You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? <sup>20</sup> Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. <sup>21</sup> And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. <sup>22</sup> And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.

<sup>23</sup> “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. <sup>24</sup> You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

<sup>25</sup> “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup> Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

<sup>27</sup> “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. <sup>28</sup> In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but, on the inside, you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

<sup>29</sup> “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. <sup>30</sup> And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ <sup>31</sup> So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. <sup>32</sup> Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!

<sup>33</sup> “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? <sup>34</sup> Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. <sup>35</sup> And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that

has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. <sup>36</sup> Truly I tell you; all this will come on this generation.

<sup>37</sup> “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. <sup>38</sup> Look, your house is left to you desolate. <sup>39</sup> For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

### Sermon: Woe to you (Isaiah 56:9-12 & Matthew 23:13-39)

Please have your **Bibles** open at **Matthew 23:13-39**

You should have a **sermon outline** to take notes if you wish.

Let me **pray** first...

### Intro/Context

Last week in Matthew 23:1-12

**Jesus** gave the **religious leaders** a **few uppercuts** regarding their **leadership** and particularly their **hypocrisy**

And in the process, last week - I **gave us all a few uppercuts** including quite an **uppercut to myself!**

This week as we look at the **rest of the chapter** –

Jesus continues to **unleash a severe attack** on the **religious leaders**

And He comes up with **seven woes**.

### **Slide 1-woe**

*A woe is an exclamation of grieve that describes things that cause sorrow or distress or trouble*

Each woe that Jesus describes – **shows the sorrow, distress and trouble** the religious leaders are causing - **for themselves** - and - **for others**

These woes are a direct contrast to the **8 Beatitudes** Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-12)

As we look at each woe — like last week — we have to be honest with ourselves – and **ask if these woes could also** apply to us

## Slide 2 – Woe #1

Woe #1 – They are a roadblock to the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 23:13)

Woe #1 - is in verse 13 – *They are a roadblock to the Kingdom of Heaven*. Jesus calls them **hypocrites**. They are so **proud and arrogant**, as we saw last week, that they **keep themselves out of the Kingdom** and worse still **keep others out**. The sense of the Greek is that **people are trying to get into the Kingdom and they cannot!** It's bad enough to keep yourself out of the Kingdom but worse still when you stand in the way of others.

By teaching their man-made traditions and human rules as being more important than God's Word, **the religious leaders took away “the key of knowledge” and closed the door of salvation on people!** (Luke 11:52).

They could not see **any need to repent of their sins** – they were alright as they were. They could see no need for Jesus – and consequently **stopped others** from following Jesus too.

## Slide 2A-App

Application – For us it means we should not only be teaching from God’s word but also following God’s Word – otherwise people might see us as hypocrites – and that might prevent them from following Jesus.

Application – The **Pharisees** didn’t see their sin and spiritual poverty. Do we see our sin and spiritual poverty and see our need for Jesus – or do we think we’re okay? **Perhaps we’re reading our Bibles blindfolded** like the picture on the front of the bulletin?

(pause)

### Woe #1A – They are greedy cheats (Matthew 23:14)

#### **Slide 3-Woe#1A**

**Woe #1A** - is in verse 14 – *They are greedy cheats.*

I’ve called this woe, **Woe #1A**, because v14 is missing from the oldest manuscripts and was probably added later with the same words from Mark 12:40/Luke 20:47.

The wording is: ***They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.***

The phrase “**they devour widows’ houses**” means they ‘**greedily cheat widows out of their property**’. In ancient times **widows held little or no power in the courts**. It was not uncommon for a **husband** to **appoint** in his will a **Jewish legal expert**—a Teacher of the Law or Pharisee—to be the **executor of his widow’s estate**. Essentially, this gave the **executor - authority** to oversee the **widow’s finances and assets**. It would **not be hard** for a **corrupt lawyer** to find legal

**ways to trick a widow** out of her house and other property—and this is **precisely what the religious leaders were doing.**

Instead of mourning over their sins and mourning with needy widows, the religious leaders took advantage of people in order to rob them.

### Slide 3A-App

Application - Are we mourning over our sins? Are we mourning with those who've lost a loved one? Do we comfort those in their grief? **Weep with those who weep?** (Romans 12:15)

(pause)

### Woe #2 – They make replicas of themselves (Matthew 23:15)

#### Slide 4-Woe#2

**Woe #2** - is in verse 15 – *They make replicas of themselves.*

Jesus again calls them hypocrites.

They go half way around the world - to **convert** (proselytize) **people** to their legalistic system and traditions - rather than **introducing them to the Living God.**

Instead of saving souls, the **Pharisees** were condemning souls.

Their **goal** was not to turn people away from their sins against God - but to convert them to their way/system. They **created replicas of themselves!**

How tragic that **people can think they are going to Heaven** when actually they are going to Hell.

### Slide 4A-App

Application - Do we need to repent of any pride - and - humble ourselves before Jesus?

Application - As we evangelize are we making sure we are a sign-post to Jesus – and not a sign-post to ourselves?

Our goal must be to help people follow Jesus – not us!

(pause)

Woe #3 - They nit-pick over promises and oaths (Matt 23: 16-22)

**Slide 5-Woe#3**

Woe #3 - is in verse 16-22 – *They nit-pick over promises and oaths!*

Here - Jesus rebukes the religious leaders - **calling them blind guides** who **nit-pick over promises and making oaths**. He says they teach that if someone swears by the temple or the altar, **it is NOT binding**, but if someone swears by the gold of the temple or the gift on the altar, then **the promise IS binding**.

Jesus points out that the - **temple and the gold – the altar and the gift** - are **inseparable**, so the distinction they make is senseless. **All promises are seen by God – and binding before God!**

**Slide 5A-App**

Application – Are we making promises – that rely on ourselves – rather than simply - trusting God in all things?

Application – Why are we **making promises anyway?** We can't **guarantee we can keep them?** Circumstances may change which prevent us keeping them.

Doesn't Jesus simply teach – that **our Yes should be Yes** – and **our No should be No?** (Matthew 5:37)

## Woe #4 – They major on minors and miss major principles (Matt 23:23-24)

### **Slide 6-Woe#4**

**Woe #4 - is in verse 23-24 – *They major on minors and miss major principles* -**

Here Jesus criticizes the religious leaders for their selective observance of the law. He points out that **they meticulously give a tenth of even the smallest items, such as mint, dill, and cumin, but neglect the more major principles of the law: things like - justice, mercy, and faithfulness.**

To illustrate His point ***about majoring on minors and missing major principles*** – **Jesus uses an analogy** in v24 - **You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.**

What Jesus means is – both **gnats and camels** are **unclean** animals and should not be eaten.

But the **religious leaders** were **careful to strain their wine** through cloth so they didn't swallow a little gnat – but by missing the major principles of justice, mercy and faithfulness – **it was like they were swallowing a camel!**

Jesus emphasizes that while they should not have neglected giving a tenth, they should have also have prioritized the major principles of justice, mercy and faithfulness.

Application – what might that mean for us?

It might mean - we wear nice clothes to church and look good, we always hand in our offering each week, we have a great attitude to prayer, we serve on committees at church – but - **when someone is treated badly, we turn a blind eye and say nothing** – **when someone comes to us for help, we don't help** – **when we see someone in need, we ignore them** – **we don't practice our faith at home or in the community - only in church?**



## Slide 6A-App

The question is: – ***are we IN church - but not BEING the church!***

Are we majoring on minors and missing the big principles of justice, mercy and faithfulness?

## Woe #5 & 6 – They focus on the outside, not the inside (Matt23: 25-28)

### Slide 7-Woe #5 & 6

Woes #5 & 6 - are in verse 25-28 – ***they focus on the outside, not the inside***

Here Jesus gives two examples of how the religious leaders focus on outward appearances and not inward appearances

1<sup>st</sup> example - The cup and dish are clean on the outside – but inside they are unclean.

2<sup>nd</sup> example – The **Tombs** are **beautifully whitewashed** on the **outside** – but inside the tomb – are **dead bodies and bones**.

Jesus' point is the **Pharisees look good** on the outside – but they are unclean and dead on the inside

In other words – their hearts are corrupt.

They are acting like – **Mrs Bucket** – from keeping up appearances.

But in **1 Samuel 16:7** it says:

*The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart*

**God** is more interested in our **hearts** – not our **outward appearance**!

## Slide 7A-App

Application – we need to guard our hearts - as Proverbs 4:23 says – “*Above all else, guard your heart, for everything flows from it*”.

Are we guarding our hearts?

What are we watching on TV? What **movies**? [Plug Case for Christ]

What are we reading?

What are we listening to?

What company are we keeping – *bad company corrupts good character* (1 Corinthians 15:33)

(pause)

### Woe #7 – They are religious frauds (Matthew 23:29-36)

#### **Slide 8-Woe#7**

Woe #7 - is in verse 29-36 – *They are religious frauds*

Jesus again challenges their hypocrisy.

They make out they care about the Old Testament prophets by **building nice tombs** for them and **decorating their grave sites**.

And they make out if they were alive back when their ancestors killed the prophets – **they wouldn't have taken part in it.**

But the religious leaders in Jesus' time - **have the same hearts as their ancestors** – in fact – Jesus knows they are going to continue that same work by killing Him!

So, Jesus tells the religious leaders – **the blood of all the OT prophets killed by their ancestors will be on their heads!**

And they will be judged for this religious fraud – pretending to be righteous before God – when all they are is pretentious self-righteous frauds.

Back in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:9 – Jesus said “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be children of God*”. Whereas the religious leaders are not peacemakers, they are murderers. They are not children of God, but children of the devil (see v15)

And still in the Sermon on the Mount - Matthew 5:10-12 – Jesus said – “*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”.

The religious leaders were not the persecuted; they are the persecutors!

### Slide 8A-App

Application - As children of God, are we looking to be peacemakers! *As far as it depends on us, do we live at peace with everyone?* (Romans 12:15). *Do we pray for those who are persecuted for Jesus’ sake?* (Matthew 5:43-45)

### Jesus’ Judgment on these woes (Matthew 23:37-38)

It’s quite a barrage from Jesus against the religious leaders

### Slide 9-Jesus’ Judgment

And we might jump to the conclusion that **Jesus is angry**.

And to some extent He is – but it’s righteous anger

But - with that anger - comes sadness and tears

Look at v37 – a beautiful verse – Jesus says:

***“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.***

All Jesus has ever wanted is **to gather His children** (the people of Israel)

**together**, like a hen gathers her chicks; but **they were not willing to accept Him**

And so instead – as v39 says – **their house will be left desolate.**

And 40 or so years later – **AD 70** – **Jerusalem and the temple is destroyed by**  
**the invading Roman army!**

### **Slide9A-App**

Application -For us then. Do we lament – like Jesus did over Jerusalem – do we lament over those who are lost from God and who reject Jesus? Do we pray that God would change their hearts? Do we pray for opportunities to witness to those lost from God? **[Plug Evangelism Outreach]**

### **Conclusion (Isaiah 56:9-12 and v39)**

To finish up then

### **Slide 10-Conclusion**

In contrast to the spiritually blind shepherds/religious leaders of Israel in Isaiah’s time and the spiritually blind shepherds/religious leaders in Jesus’ time – **we have Jesus, the Good Shepherd – to cling to and follow!**

### **Slide 10A-App**

Application

And according to v39 – **Jesus is coming back again one day**

Are we prepared or unprepared for His return?

(pause)

Are there **still people we haven't told about Jesus the Good Shepherd –The ONE - who offers forgiveness of sins - and eternal life in Heaven!**

Let's pray...

*Father God, as we reflect on Jesus' words to the religious leaders*

*Help us to acknowledge where we can sometimes fall into the same pitfalls as them.*

*Father, through your word and your Spirit, help us not to become entangled in legalism and hypocrisy - and help us not to focus on outward appearances.*

*Father, help us to keep our hearts pure and focus on the major principles of justice, mercy and faithfulness.*

*As we anticipate the return of Jesus – on a day and hour we know not when – help us to have compassion on those lost from God – and grant us boldness and opportunities to witness to them about our Lord Jesus. In His name, we pray.*

*Amen.*

**Benediction (Proverbs 4:23)**

*Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Amen.*