



Matthew 23

Matthew 23
Tape #8022
By Chuck Smith

Let's turn our Bibles to the gospel according to Matthew, and tonight we're in chapter twenty-three.

Jesus has just had a confrontation with the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the religious leaders, it's been a rather heated conversation at times, as Jesus denounces their practices, their beliefs. At the beginning of chapter twenty-three, He turns from the Pharisees and the Sadducees who He has silenced, and He begins to address Himself to the multitude of people, no doubt, that had gathered around to listen. Pharisees and Sadducees are still standing there, they're steaming inside, but Jesus now is addressing Himself to the multitude and to His disciples, but very definitely still within the hearing of the Pharisees and the scribes. But He begins to talk to the people concerning the scribes and the Pharisees.

Now the scribes were a group which began at the time of Ezra, some 400 years before Christ. When the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity and they were rebuilding the temple. They brought out the scroll of the law of the Lord and they read it to the people and they explained it to the people and it brought forth a revival among the people. But the scribes continue from that time and they were the men who were given the task of studying the law, interpreting the law, and explaining the law to the people. For the most part, the general population did not speak Hebrew, did not read Hebrew, and thus, they had to depend upon the scribes to interpret the law from the Hebrew for them. And these men gave their lives to the interpreting and the understanding of the laws, and also to defining.

When the law says, Thou shalt not bear a burden on the Sabbath day, what constitutes bearing a burden? If you have a wooden leg, would that constitute bearing a burden on the Sabbath day to strap on your wooden leg? If you had a false eye, would it constitute bearing a burden to put in your false eye on the Sabbath day? And so they tried to determine just what does constitute bearing a burden. If you wear false eyelashes, does that constitute bearing a burden on the Sabbath day? Some I've seen I think do. And ultimately, they ended up with some fifty volumes plus explaining what the law meant. That is why when Jesus earlier said to His disciples, Unless your righteousness exceeds the scribes and the Pharisees, you're never going to enter the kingdom of heaven, for you have heard that it hath been said... and so this is what they've been telling you but this is what the law really meant. And when Jesus was through, they were astounded because He didn't teach as the scribes and the Pharisees but He taught with authority. He said this is what they're telling you, this is what it is. He taught with authority.

The scribes were one group, the Pharisees were another group. They were the ones who also tried to put into practice all of the little nuances of the law. They sought to live by the law fully and completely. They spent their entire lives, devoting their lives to the strict adherence to the law. Now the Jews themselves had described the Pharisees into seven different groups. They called one group the Shoulder Pharisees, that is, they wore their religion on their shoulders, so to speak. Everything was outward so that everything they did was for outward show and display. Then there were what they called the Bruised and Bloody Pharisees. A Pharisee would never be caught in public talking to a woman, even if it was his wife. They were so strict, they weren't to be moved by any kinds of passions towards woman, so they would never talk to a woman publicly, even their wives. But there were some of them who were so strict that whenever a woman would be approaching they would close their eyes and they were always bumping into posts or buildings, and thus their faces and noses were always scabbed and bloody, so they called them the Bloody and Bruised Pharisees.

And then there were the Mortar and Pestles, or also called the Tumbling Pharisees. Now these were men who sought to put on such an appearance of humility that they always walked around bowed down, to just show humility. And they were so humble they wouldn't lift their feet, they would just shuffle. And so they were always stumbling, and so they called them the Tumbling Pharisees or the Mortars and Pestles because they were always bent over. And so the various groups. They did have what they called the Godly Pharisees,

those that were genuine and honest, but out of the seven groups, one qualified in that category which is interesting. Jesus said to them,

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: (23:2)

In the Greek it is, they have seated themselves in Moses' seat. In other words, they have declared that they themselves are the interpreters and the teachers of the law. It is in a position that they have assumed.

All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, [In other words, they are there to teach you the Mosaic law. Learn and observe the Mosaic law.] that observe and do; but do not after their works: for they say, and do not. (23:3)

The law is right, listen to the law, obey the law. But don't follow their practices because they say one thing and they do another. And basically, the fault that Jesus found with the Pharisees was that their religion was all outward. It was all for show, it was all for display, it was all to impress people. And there are those even today who do many things to impress people, they were more interested in impressing people than they were impressing God. So back to the Sermon on the Mount, the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, as He was talking about righteousness, He said, Be careful that you don't do your righteousness before men to be seen of men. This business of trying to show off how spiritual you are, doing things just to draw the attention of people so they'll say, Isn't he spiritual? Did you see that? My!

There are many affectations of spirituality. There is a horrible, ugly thing about our flesh that, can you believe that we want to be known as deeply spiritual people? That's a crazy thing of the flesh. It wants glory from people as being a very deeply spiritual person, so we have ways of demonstrating and showing just how spiritual we are. It can be with a tone of voice, it can be with affectations, it can be the folded hand, and sort of a tilted head, and oh, yes, and oh, man, that looks ... did you see that? Get close and maybe you can touch him. Maybe some of them will rub off. And there's a tendency towards that, doing things for an outward show. That was the thing that Jesus had against the Pharisees.

He said that when you give, don't be like the Pharisees who like to make a big show over their giving. Get a little band to go before them, draw attention so they show their dropping their money in the treasury of the church. Don't be like that, He said. When you fast, don't go around with long faces and all, that you appear unto men to fast. When you pray, don't be like the Pharisees who stand on the street corners. God is looking on the heart. So many times the outward things are done to attract the attention of people.

It is interesting you do today to the Western Wall, and you watch them as they come to pray, some of them are very loud, but most of them are bobbing and waving and bowing, and that draws attention and the more spiritual you are, the more you bow, the more activated you are. And people look at that and say, Wow, look at those devotions! And so Jesus is condemning that which is done to attract attention to you, or to draw attention to yourself.

To lay it out straight, I have been in services where during the singing of the choruses, there are people who will stand up, here and there in the auditorium, some of them doing a little dance and all, but these things attract attention to the individual. They take away the attention from God, at least, with me they do. I think, what are they thinking as they're standing there? Why do they always sit down near the front row? Drawing attention to themselves and distracting people from the true worship of God. Typical of the Pharisees. Jesus said,

They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and they lay them on men's shoulders; [They lay upon people these really heavy regulations,] but they're not keeping them themselves. They won't even try and lift them with one of their little fingers. (23:4)

But all their works [and here it is, you got it] they do to be seen of men: [that's the flaw, the public display, to be seen of men] they make broad their phylacteries,

The phylacteries was a little leather box and under the Mosaic law, they were told to bind the law to their forehead and bind it to their wrist, and so even to the present day, they have these phylacteries. When they go up to the Western Wall to pray, they will bind these phylacteries and you'll watch them as they wrap these little box on their forehead. The little box on their forehead has four compartments in which are written four passages from the law and the box on their hand has the same four passages, only not in four compartments but just in the one open compartment there in their hand, the little leather box. But these guys

were making big boxes. They broaden their phylacteries, they're going around with these huge boxes on their forehead and on their hands. Again, demonstration of, Hey we're really, we got it over you. We're more spiritual than you. And then they were told to put these tassels on the borders of their garments. It's to remind them that they are heavenly people, they are spiritual people.

So they would enlarge the borders, (23:5)

They make these long tassels, I mean, I'm really spiritual.

And they love the uppermost rooms at the feasts,

They love the important places. The important place at the feast was at the right hand and at the left hand of the host. And there was always a vying for that place of honor, position, authority. I want to sit at the head table. And they were always working and trying to work their way up into the position of prominence in front of the people. And then they love...

the chief seats in the synagogues, (23:6)

the people in the synagogue, ladies on the right, men on the left, but up in the front of the synagogue facing the people were the elders, those were the chief seats and that's where they like to sit so that they could look at all the people that came in and all the people recognize, these are the leaders.

They love the greetings in the markets, of men, (23:7)

They wear their fancy robes and all so that when the people greet them and they walk in the market, they say, Morning, Rabbi, Morning, Master. They love that, they love that spiritual power over others, I'm to be looked up to as the spiritual man in the community. Jesus said,

Don't be called Rabbi or Teacher: for one is your Master, and that's even Christ; you are all brothers. (23:8)

We're all of us just brothers in Christ. No one has any spiritual edge over another. God will listen to your prayers as readily as He will listen to mine. None of us have any position of hierarchy or standing above one another in the spiritual things. Because God has called me and appointed me as a pastor/teacher in the church, doesn't mean that I have a closer relationship with God or I have some special 'in' with God and that God will listen to me more than He'll listen to you. Doesn't mean that at all. It does mean that I have a greater responsibility before God to be careful of the things that I teach because I will be held accountable for how I teach the Word of God, I'll be held accountable before God, but it doesn't make me any closer to God, it doesn't make me any more spiritual, it doesn't give me an edge over you in your relationship with God. Then He said,

Don't call any man father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. (23:9)

The Father is that which has begotten, He is the One who gives life. And spiritually, there is only One who has given you spiritual life and that is God. And so don't call any man Father, there's no man that gives you spiritual life, it is God who has given you spiritual life. He has begotten you. As Peter said in his epistle, "Thanks be unto God who has begotten us again unto this living hope by the resurrection." It's God who has begotten us into the spiritual life and therefore, you're not to call any man Father on earth in the spiritual sense because it is God who gives spiritual life.

Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. (23:10)

But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. (23:11)

Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (23:12)

Jesus said to His disciples, the Gentiles love to exercise lordship. It shall not be so among you. "Whoever would be great among you, let him be the servant of all." So here again, the repetition of true greatness lies in serving, serving others. You remember when Jesus was having the Last Supper with His disciples and how He took the towel and He girded Himself and then He went around and began to wash the disciples' feet. And when He was through, He said, have you seen what I have done? They said, Yeah. And He said, now you call Me Lord and Master, and that's correct because I am your Lord and Master. But if I being your Lord and Master wash your feet, so ought you also to wash one another's feet. That is, we are to think about serving one another. "The greatest in the kingdom of heaven is the servant of all." And the way up is down, and the way down is up. "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He shall lift you up." "He that exalteth himself shall be abased." And so, to learn the lessons of just the privilege and the joy of

serving the Lord, "Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do it as unto the Lord." And, "Inasmuch as you've done it unto the least of these, my brethren," Jesus said, "you've done it unto Me." Just a cup of cold water unto a prophet in the Name of the Lord reaps a prophet's reward. Serving, the blessing, the joy, the glory of just being a servant. Learning to give and to serve one another.

Now Jesus turns directly to the Pharisees. And He begins to pronounce these seven woes. This word "woe" is a word that is... we don't have an English word for the Greek word, *ouai*, which is translated "woe." The Greek word does speak of wrath but it also speaks of sorrow, it's a combination. So when you read this, don't see fire in the eye of Jesus but see tears. He's describing, yes, their condition which is detestable. But there's a combination of judgment and sorrow as He will conclude it with just sort of a lament, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered your children together." This lament, and so as He is saying this, yes, there is the denouncing of their practices but there's also that sorrow of heart because of their blindness. They are struggling to be righteous, they have a form of righteousness, but they are so blind to the real truth, and thus, and they won't open their hearts to it, they are so bound and steeped in their traditions that they're just locked into the system and can't seem to break it. So, woe unto you, you think you're on the right path, you think you're doing the right thing, but you're on the way to destruction.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

The "hypocrite" was the actor in the Greek drama. He was the one that would hold up this false face. He might hold up a face that has this big smile on it, but behind, his true face was one of sadness and sorrow, the false face. The hypocrite is one who is wearing a false face, one who is putting on an act, one who is one thing on the outside, but something entirely different on the inside. You know what, God looks on the inside. Man looks on the outward appearance, and you might be able to deceive man, but God looks on the heart. You can't fool God. "Woe unto you..."

for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for you neither go in yourselves, neither do you allow those that are entering to go in. (23:13)

By their rules, by their rigid rules and regulations, they discouraged man from trying to enter the kingdom of heaven. They had all of their rules and regulations. You want to... this is what you have to do... impossible. But by laying up all of these barriers, they themselves did not go in. They weren't observing them, they were putting on rules that they themselves weren't really abiding by.

Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for you devour widows' houses, and for a pretence you make long prayer: therefore you're going to receive the greater damnation. (23:14)

Taking advantage of people, going around and preying upon widows. Not too far from the Televangelists today who send out these pleading letters to these little widows on social security, suggesting that they go to the bank and borrow some money to send to them to help them out of their latest emergency. Woe unto you.

Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for you compass the sea and the land to make one proselyte,

A proselyte was one who was not a Jew but who was attracted to the Jewish faith, and there were many people in that day who were attracted to Judaism. And in the synagogues, they would gather with the Jews, they would listen to the scriptures, they were interested in this concept of one God because in that time, there was, of course, great pantheism; but there were people that were attracted to the idea of one God. And they would come to the synagogues on the Sabbath day to listen to the scriptures and all, and these were the people that Paul basically ministered to when he would go around in his missionary journeys, go into the synagogue, these were the people that he attracted. They listened to him, they were fascinated with what Paul had to say. Now they were not proselytes.

The proselyte was one who went through the rite of circumcision, one who was baptized into the Jewish faith, and actually they became even more zealous than did the Jews many times concerning their religion, and that's what Jesus is talking about here. You encircle the earth to make a proselyte,

when you've made him, he becomes twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. (23:15)

Woe unto you, you blind guides, which say, Whosoever swears by the temple,

This is the way they were interpreting. I told you the scribes were giving, now you shall not take an oath

or forswear thyself... now what does that mean? What if you swear by the temple? Is that binding, do you have to keep it? And so, they said no, if you just swear by the temple, that's a little ambiguous, it isn't a binding oath so you can swear by the temple but you can get out of that.

You don't have to do it; but if you swear by the gold that's in the temple, watch out, that's binding. You have to keep that one. (23:16)

If you swear by the altar, ...a little ambiguous, you don't have to keep that vow, you can break that, that's isn't a binding oath. But if you swear by the sacrifice that is on the altar, oh man, you've had it, you got to keep that one. And so going down the line with all these crazy interpretations. Jesus said,

You fools and blind: what is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold? (23:17)

So Jesus again, this is what they were teaching but now He lays it straight.

Whosoever therefore shall swear by the altar; he swears by it and all of the things that are on it. (23:18)

It's binding.

Whosoever shall swear by the temple, swears by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. (23:21)

You're swearing by God.

And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and him that sitteth thereon. (23:22)

Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, you hypocrites! for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, you've omitted the weightier matters of the law, of judgment, mercy, and faith: these you ought to have done, but you shouldn't leave the others undone. (23:23)

Now He speaks of giving their tithes. They were so scrupulous in their tithing. One tenth of your crops was a tithe unto the Lord. You would bring in a tenth of your wheat, a tenth of your fruit, you would tithe it to the Lord. Well, these fellows, they all had their little spice gardens in the window boxes in the kitchen. They all grew their little anise and their cummin and their mint. And these guys would tear off the mint leaves, nine for me, one for the Lord. Count the little seeds of the spices, nine for me and one for the Lord. And they were tithing of their spices, measuring them out, tithing. And yet, they were cheating, they were unscrupulous in their dealings with others, they were unmerciful, and Jesus said, You're emphasizing the wrong things. You ought to tithe, yes. But don't leave out being merciful, being fair, being honest, being true.

You blind guides, [He said] which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. (23:24)

Literally, rather than strain at a gnat, in the Greek it is "You strain out a gnat." When they would drink their wine, they would pour it through a cloth because little gnats come and they land on the cup and they land in the wine and some of them get caught and drown in the wine, and so they would always pour it through a cloth into the cup before they would drink it to strain out any little gnats that might be in it, because a gnat was unclean, an unclean insect. But Jesus said, You strain out these little gnats but you swallow camels. You are very exacting on stupid little things and then you just, these weightier things of justice, mercy and all, you just ignore those. And so He gets after them.

Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for you make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within you are full of extortion, you are full of excesses. (23:25)

You're gluttonous. You heap up for yourself excesses. All the outside looks good, you make it real clean. But inside there's extortion.

You blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and the platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. (23:26)

What's inside, Jesus said, is really more important than what is outside, and what is inside, if it is clean, then it will work its way out. Get your heart right before God, your life will become right before God. This outward religion just doesn't make it. God is interested in what's going on in your heart. Get your heart clean. Clean up within. The outside will follow.

Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but inside of them they are dead men's bones, and all kinds of putridness. (23:27)

Under the law, if you would touch a dead body, ceremonially you would be unclean and not be able to enter into the temple to worship until you went through the rites of purification. If you touch anything that was touched by a dead body, you would be unclean. And so these sepulchres, to touch a sepulcher, because

there was a dead body also touching it, would make you spiritually unclean. Now most of the sepulchres of the people were buried alongside the roads. It is interesting today that as you travel in Israel, you will see many of these large limestone tombs, right along the road. And many of the roads follow the ancient Roman roads. And as they have excavated for the new highways, you find alongside of the road just scores of these big limestone tombs because most of them were buried alongside of the road. When the pilgrims were making their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in order to worship at the feast, if they would happen to touch one of these sepulchres on the way to Jerusalem, they get wiped out. You're unclean, you can't enter in and worship God. So what they would do, the month of Adar, as the people would be readying to journey, they would go out and whitewash, they'd paint all of these sepulchres so they really stand out, so you know not to touch it. You're tired, you don't lean up against that rock and find out... might as well go home. Can't go into worship. So they would whitewash them. And as you were journeying along the road, all these beautiful whitewashed sepulchres, and they did look beautiful. But inside of them there were decaying bodies, bones. He said, that's the way... outside you make yourself look so beautiful, so spiritual, so nice. But inside there's just putrefication.

So outwardly you appear righteous unto men, but within you're full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (23:28)

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! because you build the tombs of the prophets,

And there in the Kidron Valley just down below the Temple Mount area, you see these beautiful tombs of the prophets that have been built there in the walls of the cliffs. Ornate, glorious, tomb of Zechariah and tomb of Absalom and so forth down there. And you built these tombs of the prophets.

and you garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, (23:29)

They put all kinds of ornamentation on them.

And you say, If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have killed the prophets like they did. (23:30)

We are better than they are. If we had lived in their days, we wouldn't have done those things. But Jesus said,

Be witnesses unto yourselves, that you are the children of those who killed the prophets. (23:31)

And you fill up then the measure of your fathers. (23:32)

You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you hope to escape the damnation of Gehenna? (23:33)

Heavy duty. His scathing denunciation of outward religion, showy religion. People who have a great show are ostentatious. Now you say if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have destroyed the prophets. But Jesus said,

Behold, I'm going to send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them you are going to kill and crucify; and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and you will persecute them from city to city: (23:34)

And as you read the book of Acts, you find out that that is exactly what happened to the apostles. As they went out to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, they were killed, they were crucified, they were scourged in the synagogues, they were persecuted from city to city. Read Paul's description of the things that he endured at the hands of the Jews.

That upon you may come all the righteous blood that has been shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias the son of Barachias, whom you slew between the temple and the altar. (23:35)

Verily I say unto you, All these things are going to come upon this generation. (23:36)

You say, we're better than our fathers, we wouldn't do that. He said, Hey, the whole guilt of the whole thing is going to be on you. From the beginning, the righteous blood has often been shed by wicked men. There is an enmity in the heart of sinful man against God. And that enmity against God is carried out in persecution and seeking to silence the witness of God's prophets. So that this animosity of the wicked against the righteous has been demonstrated from the beginning of time.

The two sons of Adam, Abel was a righteous man. He brought his sacrifice to the Lord by faith and God honored and blessed his sacrifice. Cain was an evil man. God rejected Cain's sacrifice and he became angry at God and at Abel who was God's righteous representative and he killed Abel, the innocent blood, the

righteous blood of Abel was shed on the ground. Remember God said his blood crieth up to Me from the ground.

Zacharias the son of Barachias creates a problem. There are many suggested solutions to the problem. In Second Chronicles chapter twenty-four, verse twenty, you might turn there, this is during the reign of Joash, the wicked king.

“And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and he said unto them, Thus saith God, [he was prophesying to the people] Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD, [because when you do that], you cannot prosper? because you have forsaken the LORD, he has also forsaken you.

And they conspired against him,

[he was giving them God’s Word, he was telling them the truth, they didn’t want to hear the truth, and so they conspired against him]

and they stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD.

[Right there in the court of the house of the Lord, this man was stoned. According to the Jewish tradition, this is why the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians because of the innocent blood of Zechariah that was shed there on the temple.]

Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada the father [of Zechariah] had done unto him, but he slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it.” (2 Chronicles 24:20-22)

Now Jesus is saying the righteous blood was going to be required on this generation from Abel to Zechariah. The interesting thing is that this Zechariah, we are told, is the son of Jehoiada. And yet, Jesus makes reference to Zechariah, the son of Barachias. But probably referring to this because if He talks about the blood being required of this generation. How do you explain it?

One other interesting thing, of course, the first book in the Old Testament of the Jewish scriptures is the book of Genesis. And there in the book of Genesis, you have the wicked’s animosity against the righteous, the slaying of Abel. In the order of the books in the Jewish Bible, Second Chronicles is the last book, in the order that they had set them out. And we are close to the end of Second Chronicles so that actually from the first book of the Old Testament to the last book of the Old Testament in the Jewish Bible, you have the righteous being persecuted and killed by the wicked. So you see the complete cycle.

Now how is it that he’s called the son of Jehoiada here and yet son of Barachias. The prophet Zechariah, the Old Testament prophet, who lived some 400 years after this time, actually more than that, about 450 years later, he was the son of Barachia. But we don’t have any record of his being martyred. It is possible that it is a reference to this later Zechariah who was one of the last of the Old Testament prophets, after him there was a long period of silence for 400 years when God did not speak through prophets to the people, and it could be that he was also murdered or put to death by the people and it isn’t recorded in the scripture.

However, there are other possibilities. This particular Zechariah in Second Chronicles, the son of Jehoiada, oftentimes in the scripture, they do not, when they say the son of Jehoiada, it could be a grandson of Jehoiada. And still he would be called the son of Jehoiada. For instance, in the book of Daniel, you have Belshazzar who is called the son of Nebuchadnezzar. In reality, he was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. His father’s name was Nabonidus, and thus he was a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, but because of no one really knew much of the father of Belshazzar so he was called the son of Nebuchadnezzar because he was the important name in history. And thus, it is possible that Jehoiada had a son, Barachias, who then bore Zechariah. And he would still be called in that sense the son of Jehoiada. That’s a possibility. Or it is possible that the Zechariah of the Old Testament prophets some 400 years later was the one that Jesus was referring to. Or, one further possibility is that when the scriptures were being copied, the copyist when he wrote down the blood of Zechariah, he could have just thought, well, that’s the son of Barachias because that’s the Zechariah of the Old Testament. He may have just made a mistake in the copying.

We believe that the scriptures are inspired of God and are inerrant in their original writings which we don’t have. We believe that through the copying of the scriptures, it’s possible that there could be little slip ups like this with names by those who were copying the scriptures that if you actually found the original

manuscript that Matthew wrote--which God won't let you find because people would be worshipping it, would make a shrine and everybody would travel all over the world to bow at this thing and of course, would be selling little portions of it for a lot of money and people would begin to worship the thing. So God hasn't let us have any of the original writings, the autographed copies—but... and thus, those are the possibilities.

Jerome, one of the early church fathers, who spent a lot of time translating the scriptures declared that it was Jehoiada should have been the name here, the son of Jehoiada. And he said that in some of the copies he had, Jehoiada was in there. So it could be a copious error. We don't know. That's just to explain a possible discrepancy that you see here.

Jesus said, I say unto you, all of these things, the guilt of all of these is going to come on this generation. Why? As Stephen, when he was defending himself before the council, talked about all of the prophets that God had sent to them, he said, Which of the prophets of God did you not persecute or kill? Just name me one prophet that you accepted. Name one that you didn't imprison, persecute or kill. And he said, But you're worse than all of your fathers because you killed the one they were all prophesying of, even Jesus Christ. So upon this generation, the guilt of all of the righteous blood that has been shed by the wicked is going to come on this generation because they're the generation that are going to kill the Son of God. And in a couple of days, they do.

This is it, Jesus is... He's gone too far as far as they're concerned. They cannot allow Him to go on. They got to get rid of Him or they're going to be out of a job. And so they've determined He's got to go. And this is the final word that He has to them, it's a scathing indictment. And yet, here they are, as wicked as can be. And still He says,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that have killed the prophets, and stoned those which were sent to you, how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen that gather her chicks, but you would not! (23:37)

As wicked as they were, still He loved them. Still He desired to do good for them. Still he wanted to protect them, as a mother hen thrusts out her feathers and the little chicks run in underneath and hide from danger. Even as they run underneath the wings and feel the warmth during the night, the closeness of the mother hen. So Jesus said I would have gathered you. I would have protected you. I wanted that closeness with you. But you would not. Man's failure to receive God's love, God's provision, leads to disaster.

Because your house is left unto you desolate. (23:38)

You have no more defense, I'm not going to stand up for you any longer. You have forsaken God, God is going to forsake you. Your house, this house, this temple is going to be left desolate. The city of Jerusalem is going to be left desolate. And how true within forty years, over one million Jews in Jerusalem were slain when the Roman troops came in and devastated the city.

For I say unto you, You will not see me henceforth, until you shall say, Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord. (23:39)

He's going to die, He will rise again, He will ascend into heaven and He will wait until the Jews begin to pray, Oh God, send our Messiah, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

We read in the book of Hebrews how that God has put all things in subjection unto Jesus, but we do not yet see all things in subjection. But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor. And He is sitting there, expecting, waiting, until God had made His enemies His footstool.

Today, Israel is in deep trouble. They are on the verge of a civil war which will, to their enemies, be an indication of their weakness and an invitation to attack. The future of the modern nation of Israel has never been in such a precarious position as it is tonight. The nation is divided, deeply divided, over the present government's peace initiative, the surrendering of land for peace, and the endangering of the security of the nation of Israel by the returning of the Golan Heights to Syria, by giving Jericho in the Jordan Valley there to the control of the PLO, plus the Gaza strip. Those in the settlements are ready to fight to hold on to that which they have invested their lives in. And there are strong demonstrations going on in Israel over these very issues, it's divided. It could be that we are getting extremely close to that time when they realize that their only hope for survival in the future is in the Messiah. And that they will soon be praying, Come

quickly, Lord Jesus.

It is interesting that all over Israel, you see yellow banners with red writing which says, Get ready, Messiah is coming. They are beginning to call out, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. And when they do, they'll see Him again. Then shall they see the Son of Man coming with clouds in great glory, and they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced. Can't be far off. It's rather exciting.

As I look at our world, we are in perilous times. The California state educational system is causing children in four grades to take a test called Class. The state legislature right now is considering a bill that will make it illegal for them to reveal to the parents the questions in these tests called Class. They are requiring it in this new bill that is before the state legislature, they're requiring a student to take the test before he can graduate from high school. And they are forcing this upon the school districts whether they want it or not, making it a requirement for graduation. And they have told the teachers that if they speak out against it, they'll lose their tenure and lose their jobs. Or if they dare to reveal the contents of the test, or copy the contents of the test. This sounds so anti, un-American, that you wonder what's going on. There is a bill before our state legislature right now to enforce the taking of this test called Class, in which students are told to give their opinions, they read of some case of incest, and then you're to write if any of things like this have ever happened to you, as a part of the English part of the testing. Asked to reveal things that are going on in their homes. An invasion of privacy. We're in perilous times.

This past week I was in Colorado and a captain in the Air Force took me into NORAD, quite an experience. He was the Air Force adviser to the general who sits there at that monitor watching the screens that show the invasion of our air space through the radar, or through the guided systems and so forth, and this Air Force officer was the one who is to inform the general of all of the invasion of our space by unidentified objects coming as airplanes. There's another fellow who sits on the other side who identifies the missiles and so forth. And this captain was telling me that people in America today have a false sense of security because he said there are as many or more missiles aimed today at the United States than there has ever been. We are under a greater threat of destruction than we have ever been. And yet we are letting down our defenses. It's as though the Cold War is over. It's as though everything is peace and safety. But he said there are actually more missiles aimed at the United States today from Russia and Russian subs and these giant Bear bombers and all than there has ever been. The threat is greater than it's ever been. And yet we're relaxing. I don't tell you these things to scare you. I just tell them to get you excited because the Lord is got to be coming soon. And I'll tell you, I'm one that's saying, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus.

Father, thank You for Your Word. And Lord, as we look ahead to next Sunday and the disciples asked You specifically of the signs of the times and of your coming at the end of the age, we thank You Lord that You took the time to explain to them just what those signs were. And thus Lord as we look at our world in light of what You said, help us Lord to come into that awareness, consciousness that the coming of the Lord is at hand. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh. So bless us Lord as we study the twenty-fourth chapter. Let our hearts be prepared for Your coming. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.