MATTHEW 23

* Chapter 23 will be Jesus’ most severe condemnation of the Jewish elite.
* The entire chapter is dedicated to calling out their hypocrisy and making absolutely clear to His listening audience they are frauds.

Mat 23:1 - Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,

Mat 23:2 - “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat,

Mat 23:3 - so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.

* Jesus turns to the disciples and crowds and lays into their religious leaders.
* Imagine the scene:
  + Jerusalem is full of locals and visitors for the Passover feast.
  + They’ve welcomed Jesus who they believe is the Messiah who will liberate them.
  + Now their 30 year old Messiah is ripping apart their respected teachers who in their mind were a pillar of their faith.
  + It is difficult to say how the common Jews viewed the priests, elders, Pharisees, and Sadducees but it is clear from Matthew 27:20 they still had influence among the people.
  + How might the Jews have responded?
    - Some may have thought, “That’s right, our religious leaders are corrupt and this is what we should expect from Messiah.”
    - But it seems the majority may have been turned off by Jesus’ harsh words.
      * This may be part of the reason the Jews who struck fear into the chief priests and Pharisees in chapter 21:45-46 changed their mind towards the end of the week and sided with the chief priests and Pharisees.
  + APPLICATION:
    - Even when religious leaders are exposed for hypocrisy and greed it may not be enough for their disciples to abandon them.
      * How many false teachers and swindlers and cult leaders are so respected by their people they can excuse their actions, no matter how corrupt, with any old bad lie they can think up.
    - But on a more subtle level, a lesson we can learn from this context is, don’t side with someone on religious matters just because you respect them!
      * Many people practice religion a certain way because someone they respected told them to practice it that way.
      * Sometimes, even against their better judgement, they continue to practice a religion a certain way because to abandon it would be offensive to the person they respect.
      * Our text is a great example of why that is a terrible idea.
        + The Jews, using their better judgement, had concluded Christ was the Messiah.
        + But by the end of the week, against their better judgement, they sided with the chief priests and elders to have Jesus crucified.
        + The reason… Not because Jesus had been found to be inconsistent with the Scriptures. He was in every way consistent with the Scriptures.
        + The reason… Because their leaders convinced them!
      * Their leaders were wrong.
      * Their respect was misplaced.
      * Were some of them honestly deceived? Yes, we see that in Acts 2.
      * That is why it is so important not to believe something just because it came from someone you respect, especially when it comes to the outcome of your soul.
      * We need to search the Scriptures for ourselves!
* Back to our text…
* As Moses was the original deliverer of the Old Testament Law to the children of Israel, the scribes and the Pharisees now fill that role.
* In their community, they’re job was to teach and interpret the Law.
* Jesus tells the Jews to “observe whatever they tell you…”
  + I think this has to be understood as a general principle.
  + Jesus has already condemned some of the teachings and applications of the Pharisees and scribes, so it wasn’t as if their instruction on the Law was always 100% accurate.
  + But, so far as their teaching was consistent with Moses’ teaching on the Law, it was to be respected and followed.
* He tells them to “observe whatever they tell you… but not the works they do.”
  + Here we have a classic example of the parent telling their child, “Do as I say, not as I do!”
  + The messages which came out of the scribes and Pharisees mouths never translated into their lives (which is why Jesus repeatedly calls them hypocrites).
  + APPLICATION:
    - How difficult is it these days to find a Church that has faithful preaching and faithful practitioners.
    - If you look hard enough, you can find a Church with faithful, scriptural, applicable preaching.
    - But you have to look even harder to find a Church with faithful preaching and a body of believers who then takes what they’ve professed in the building out into the world.
    - Like the Jews, the Church needs leaders who will show them how to marry those two things.
      * To often, when we are looking for “Church leaders,” we look for a man who can do a great job filling a pulpit and preaching a sermon.
      * But we need men to lead congregations out into the world and show them what following Christ looks like outside of Sunday morning assembly.
      * Incidentally, how much time of Jesus’ ministry has He spent talking about how to act in the Sunday morning worship assembly? That’s right… almost none.

Mat 23:4 - They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

* You can see a picture of a man bent over with a heavy burden and a Pharisees behind him adding wrapped packages full of rigorous tradition on his already heavy load saying, “just one more.”
* As we’ve seen in our study, the Jewish religious leader’s application of the Law was harsh and unconcerned with loving God or loving one’s neighbor.
* The Old Testament Law was difficult to keep and the Pharisees made it even harder.
* A good example of this is found in Mark 2:27 (parallels the text of Matthew 12).
  + The Pharisees had made up all kinds of strict rules about what it meant to “keep Sabbath.”
  + Jesus reminds them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”
  + The Sabbath was a day meant to ease men’s burdens and stress but the Pharisees had made it a burden on men.

Mat 23:5 - They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long,

* Their religion was motivated by pride.
* They weren’t as interested in praising God as much as men praising them.
* APPLICATION:
  + This is not just a Pharisee and scribe problem.
  + This is an everybody problem.
  + When we’ve escaped the pride that keeps us outside of Christ and the Church, we then have to begin a new battle with pride inside the Church.
* What on earth is a phylactery?
  + 
  + 
  + The phylactery is also known as a tefillin.
  + It contained small rolls of parchment on which were written passages from the Law of Moses.
  + It is thought the phylactery was created in response to Deuteronomy 1:18
    - “You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”
    - Although many Jews believed this passage to be metaphorical, others created specific traditions of practice around these words.
  + Archeological evidence in Qumran (where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found) confirm the existence of phylacteries in the 1st Century.
  + The phylactery can have two parts.
    - The first, is the small box worn on the head and containing Torah passages.
    - The second, is the leather band wrapping around the forearm.
      * Additional traditions developed around these two items.
      * Debate existed on the order in which Torah passages had to be placed inside the phylactery.
      * There were also rules about the length of the leather arm strap and how many times it had to be wrapped around the arm.
  + One very interesting point which is missed without the historical study of the phylactery is the inclusion of Deuteronomy 6:4-9.
    - 4 passages from the books of Moses (first 5 books of the OT) were included in the phylactery.
      * Exodus 13:1–10
      * Exodus 13:11–16
      * Deuteronomy 6:4–9
      * Deuteronomy 11:13-21
    - Why did I single out Deuteronomy 6:4-9? Because Jesus just quoted this passage in Matthew 22:37.
      * The Pharisees approached Jesus asking Him about the greatest command in the Law.
      * Jesus responded with Deuteronomy 6:5.
      * “You shall love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”
      * What are they told to do with this teaching?
      * “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deut 6:8)
      * The Pharisees and scribes had the greatest command literally sitting on their forehead
      * But they totally missed it.
      * In their rigorous attempt to follow Deuteronomy 6:5-9, they spent time arguing about the details of verse 8, but had all but forgotten verse 6.
        + “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart” (Deut 6:6).
        + The greatest command was sitting on their head and was wrapped around their arm but they had neglected the command to put it in their heart.
        + There was no love of God in their hearts.
        + The greatest command was not what motivated them.
        + Pride and praise motivated them and it is the motivation behind Jesus’ condemnation.
    - Understanding this passage gives new light to a verse we will encounter later in the chapter. We will deal with this one aspect now.
      * Mat 23:23  “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.
      * The Pharisees were very detailed in their religious tradition keeping but they neglected the big things God wanted them to do.
      * While they were busy arguing about the order of the parchment on their head and the length of their arm strap, God and their neighbors were being forgotten.
* What are the “fringes” of verse 5?
  + This probably refers back to a command given to the people of Israel in Numbers 15:37-40.
  + Num 15:37-40 - The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner. And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God.
  + 
  + Today, we see blue clothing everywhere, but in the ancient world, it was probably much less common to see blue fabric.
  + SIDE NOTE: In modern scholarship, there is a big debate about the source material used by the Jews to create the blue dye.
  + God told the Jews to wear these blue tassels to remind them of God’s commands.
  + Apparently the Pharisees and scribes made theirs especially large to indicate their respect for the Law.
    - There are also early rabbinic traditions which specify the number of stings which needed to be dyed blue and the type of dye.
    - Some rabbis even cursed those who used cheaper dye alternatives.
    - Other scriptural principles were often pulled into these debates to give legitimacy to a particular position.
  + Is it hard to see why Jesus was mad?
  + Digging in to this historical study helps us understand the cause of Jesus’ frustration.
  + The Pharisees and scribes weren’t concerned about a man with a withered hand in the synagogue but if you weren’t using the right dye on your tassels you needed to repent.
  + APPLICATION:
    - This can happen in modern churches with modern Christians.
    - Christians can sit around arguing about things on which God has not been specific.
      * They will tie in biblical principles they think are relevant to prove their position.
      * And that isn’t in-and-of-itself a bad thing.
      * But maybe we should consider if we are spending too much time doing that and too little time accomplishing the things God has been specific about.
    - Would we care anything about the man with the withered hand?
      * Let’s consider our actions before we give a knee-jerk “Yes!” to the question.
      * Have I done anything for a handicapped person in my town?
      * Have I done anything for the poor in my town?
      * Does the balance of my time go to accomplishing the greatest commands in the Law or is the balance of my time spend in the back of a church building discussing minute issues or on Facebook debating nuances of the Law?
      * Most importantly, have I done anything for my neighbor who lives down the street from me or who works with me who, by my own confession, is going to hell without Jesus?
      * Do I accomplish the clear work of God or is my head so buried in hazy theological nit-picking I miss the forest for the trees?
  + APPLICATION:
    - It is possible to be surrounded in religious practice and scriptural study and have no affection for God.
    - The Pharisees did it every day. They had scripture on their forehead, wrapped around their arms, and hanging from the corners of their clothing but they didn’t love God or know Him.
    - Consider a child who grows up in a strong congregation to faithful parents.
      * They grow up attending Bible class
      * Reading the Bible
      * Participating in “Church activities”
      * Singing
      * Praying
    - And then as soon as they leave the house, their faith seems to evaporate.
    - How does that happen?
    - Because they were good at religious practice but the deeper meaning behind the practice was never appreciated.
    - A person can be surrounded by beauty and never appreciate it.
    - Christians can go through motions, but observing someone in a motion doesn’t reveal everything about them.

Mat 23:6 - and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues

* In American culture, the seating order at worship isn’t a big deal (unless someone steals your seat lol) but in Jesus’ day it mattered a lot.
  + When you were invited to someone’s house, it mattered where you were placed around the table (Luke 14:10).
  + Location = status to the host.
  + Evidently, the same practice had leaked into Jewish synagogue worship.
  + Location = status before God.
* The Pharisees and scribes loved the best seats so those observing would assume their righteousness.

Mat 23:7 - and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.

Mat 23:8 - But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.

Mat 23:9 - And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.

Mat 23:10 - Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.

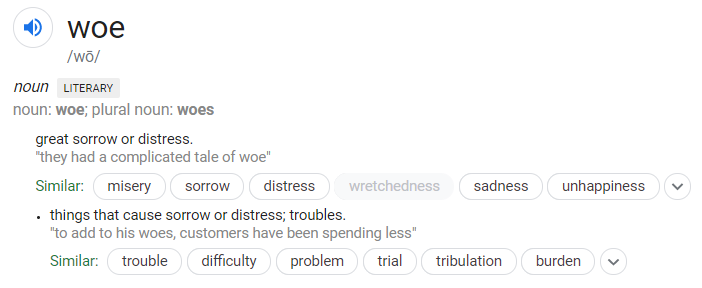
* The Pharisees and scribes loved when people called them “rabbi.”
* Rabbi means “teacher” per John 1:38.
* Jesus tells them not to desire the title.
* The next few verses give a list of titles Jesus didn’t want them to desire.
* I think this verse can be a bit confusing in light of the rest of the New Testament.
  + The apostle Paul called himself a teacher when writing to Timothy.
  + 1Tim 2:7 - For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a **teacher** of the Gentiles in faith and truth.
  + Paul also referred to himself as a “father” to the Corinthians
  + 1Co 4:15 - For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your **father** in Christ Jesus through the gospel.
* If Jesus was telling His disciples not to call anyone teacher, father, or instructor, what is Paul doing?
* Other passages should also be considered:
  + Timothy is told to teach.
  + He is told to pass Paul’s words on to faithful men so they can teach.
  + Titus is told to teach.
  + James says not many should be teachers (but that obviously implies some should).
  + The Hebrews writer tells the people they “ought to be teachers.”
  + Jesus tells His Apostle’s to teach in Matthew 28.
* I do not believe Jesus is here trying to ban these words from the English language (or in their case Greek and Aramaic).
* Nor is He trying to ban them in every religious context.
* In my understanding, Jesus is communicating that these titles are not to be used to signify spiritual “class” or spiritual authority.
  + I think Albert Barnes says it well in his commentary.
  + The term “father” used in a spiritual sense denotes “authority, eminence, superiority, a right to command, and a claim to particular respect.” In this sense it is used here. In this sense it belongs eminently to God, and it is not right to give it to people.
  + It is not to be used as a title of distinction. Why? Because “you are all brothers” (verse 8).
  + Other Christians, no matter how spiritually mature, are not our instructors in that they have authority in-and-of themselves to lead or guide us. Their words are nothing without the backing of the Holy Spirit (or Christ in this case).
* Jesus tells His listeners they should not desire other men to see them as their superiors, nor should they refer to other men by titles of superiority and authority.
* APPLICATION:
  + Pride in religion is exceptionally stupid when we understand all we do as Christians is communicate the authority of God to others, we don’t personally have any!
  + We should strive to be teachers of God’s authority.
  + But if our desire is for others to look at us like the authority we communicate is coming from us and therefore we should be exalted in status, we rob God.
  + When through gospel preaching we take people’s eyes off God and put them on ourselves, we messed up.
  + We should neither want the attention which belongs to God, nor should we give that attention to another.
* This is why I’m not a fan of terms like “clergy” and “laypeople.”
* This principle is violated anytime we lift up a teacher as the sole capable interpreter of God’s will/word.

Mat 23:11 - The greatest among you shall be your servant.

Mat 23:12 - Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

* Christ was the greatest among them and the greatest among us.
* He was days away from being murdered for the world’s good.
* The cross certainly wasn’t one of the “best seats.”
* But it was the position Jesus accepted to direct the praise of men towards God, then, now, and into eternity.
* The greatest in the Kingdom would mimic Him.
* And like Christ, the one who humbles himself/herself will be exalted in glory with God.
* APPLICATION:
  + Greatness is in humility, not taking any of the glory for yourself, instead, returning it to the King.
  + Greatness is in doing the heavy lifting on another’s burden (contrast to verse 4).

The 7 “Woes”

* The second half of chapter 23 is a somewhat well known text and it contains the 7 “Woe” statements of Jesus.
* The passage stands out because of Jesus’ powerful imagery and no-holds-barred condemnation of the hypocrisy of the Jew’s leaders.
* 

Mat 23:13 - “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.

* They make obedience to God inaccessible on account of their rigorous traditions.
* In addition, they were actively trying to hinder people from entering at the “Door” (John 10:9)
  + Jesus was the only entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven and they were trying to lock, deadbolt, and cross bar the door.
  + It wasn’t enough for them to reject Jesus themselves, they were actively working to undermine everything He did in the eyes of the people.
  + Those who wanted to learn from Christ were hindered by fear of the Pharisees and Sadducees (John 9:22)
  + Rev 3:20 - Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.
  + The Jewish leaders were doing everything they could to keep the person Jesus was inviting from answering the door.

Mat 23:15 - Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

* First things first, what is a proselyte?
  + You may occasionally still hear this term today to refer to someone who has converted to a religion or particular way of life.
  + A Jewish proselyte was a non-Jew who converted to follow the Law of Moses.
  + It seems the historical record is somewhat sparse when it comes to information on the process or the specific rules surrounding proselytization.
* Although, to my knowledge, there is no command in the Old Testament encouraging the Jews to make proselytes, Jesus’ words inform us the Pharisees and scribes were engaged in attempts to attract converts, sometimes at great expense.
* The problem was, when they convinced them to convert, they trained them to be equally as hypocritical as they were.

Mat 23:16 - “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’

Mat 23:17 - You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?

Mat 23:18 - And you say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.’

Mat 23:19 - You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

Mat 23:20 - So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.

Mat 23:21 - And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it.

Mat 23:22 - And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.

* In verse 16, Jesus calls them “blind guides.”
* You can’t guide someone else if you can’t see for yourself.
* The Pharisees and scribes couldn’t see clearly and it was evidenced by their ridiculous rules surrounding swearing and what bound a man vs. what didn’t.
  + Apparently, the Pharisees and scribes had made up some arbitrary rules about which oaths were legitimate and needed to be kept and which oaths could be discarded.
  + If a person swore by the Temple… it wasn’t binding.
  + If a person swore by the gold in the Temple… it was binding.
  + If a person swore by the alter of burnt offering… it wasn’t binding.
  + If a person swore by the sacrifice on the altar… it was binding.
    - If this confuses you… it’s probably a good thing
    - Jesus seems to be equally confused (and angry) at how they came up with these nonsense rules.
* An obvious and major problem here was their support of the idea that some promises had to be kept and others didn’t.
* Jesus had already instructed His disciples on making oaths (Matthew 5:33-37) and His conclusion was “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’
  + Human beings don’t have any right to make oaths on things they don’t own or in any way control.
  + But, even if they did, the rules about swearing promoted by the Pharisees were still ridiculous.
    - A person could swear by the Temple and break their oath but if they swore by the gold in the Temple they were bound.
      * How ridiculous considering it is only the holiness of the Temple that makes the gold special.
    - A person could swear by the altar and break their oath but if they swore by the sacrifice on the altar they were bound.
      * How ridiculous considering the animal on top of the altar was only special because it was being sacrificed on a holy altar.
* But how consistent was this with the Pharisees’ disposition to religious practice?
  + They exalted the performance of sacrificial ritual practice more than they exalted the God who made those things holy.
  + Without a God to make their actions holy, they were just going through meaningless motions.
* It may also have been the case they had made up these rules to enable deception.
  + If they swore by the Temple, it would sound pretty trustworthy to the person they were swearing to, but they could then turn around and say “Oh, just kidding! That one didn’t count!”
  + Like making a promise with your fingers crossed behind your back.
  + They may have created the rule to make it easy for them to lie.
* All of this being considered, is there any question they were “blind guides” and unfit to lead the people?

Mat 23:23 - “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

Mat 23:24 - You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

* Mint, dill, and cumin are all small herbs.
  + If you’ve ever had an herb garden or you spend any time cooking in the kitchen you are probably familiar with them.
  + Jesus uses these three herbs because they are very small in size.
* In the Old Testament, the Jewish people were commanded to “tithe” their income. This meant giving a percentage of their income to the LORD.
* Here, Jesus is saying, the Pharisees are meticulous in tithing even the smallest herbs of their income in order to comply with God’s command but they neglect the big things.
  + They’ve abandoned the pursuit of justice, mercy, and faithfulness (which were also commanded in the Law).
  + They were spending so much time in the details, they forgot the big picture.
* APPLICATION:
  + The same thing can happen to the modern Church.
  + We can get caught up in the details and forget the big picture.
  + Notice, Jesus doesn’t condemn them for caring about the details, He condemns them for neglecting the big things.
  + It is right to care about the details but the bigger picture must be kept in view.
  + We can’t get bogged down in the details of one command and excuse ourselves from the rest (definitely some application here).
  + What might it look like to lose the bigger picture?
    - Christians that get caught up arguing with brethren about what color to paint the church building. They forget the color doesn’t matter but unity really matters.
    - Christians who debate to win arguments instead of saving souls.
    - Christians who study the Bible in depth but never act on its instruction. It is right to study the Bible but pointless if we forget the reason we study.
* Looking at verse 24 now, in those days, people didn’t have refrigerators and much of their food probably sat out exposed to the open air.
* When making bread, they may have strained the flour to ensure bugs hadn’t gotten into the ingredients.
* The Pharisees and scribes are so microscopic in their view they strain out the small gnats but miss a camel and end up swallowing it.
* Have you ever seen a movie where a character is so focused on one thing they miss the chaos going on in every direction around them? That is kind of the idea.
* This also happens with business ideas. Someone methodically digs into the numbers to show why a product will be a success at market, but it ends up flopping because some bigger picture was missed.

Mat 23:25 - “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.

Mat 23:26 - You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

* Do you want to drink from a cup that looks great on the outside but is filled with grime on the inside? I didn’t think so.
* But such a cup paralleled the character of the Pharisees and scribes.
  + They looked great to the outside world and to the common Jew.
  + But internally they were as corrupt as anyone.
* To be clean only on the outside is not to be clean at all in the eyes of God (remember how Jesus wants people’s hearts?).
* Only when the inside is cleaned first can a person’s externals be acceptable to God.

Mat 23:27 - “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.

Mat 23:28 - So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

* The Jews were not supposed to walk on graves, it made them “unclean” according to Numbers 19:16.
  + Num 19:16 - Whoever in the open field touches someone who was killed with a sword or who died naturally, or touches a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.
* If you’ve ever walked through an old cemetery you’ll know it isn’t always easy to spot the grave markers, especially if the cemetery hasn’t been well maintained.
  + Moss, ivy, and grass often grow over flat grave markers.
  + Stones are weathered by the wind, rain, and heat and start to blend in with their surroundings.
* In order to keep people from accidently walking on graves or touching them, the stones would be whitewashed so they were obvious to people passing by.
* Although we don’t follow the same rules about ritual uncleanliness, gravestones are often maintained by groundskeeper and family to keep everything looking nice.
* The idea in this text is that the Pharisees are like well maintained graves.
  + The outward visible portion (the headstone) is well maintained, handsomely cared for, and obvious to the average passersby.
  + But the inside is just like a grave. No matter how much you dress up the externals it is still full of bones and decay.
* This “woe” is similar to the last in meaning but different in illustration.

Mat 23:29 - “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous,

Mat 23:30 - saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’

Mat 23:31 - Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

Mat 23:32 - Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.

* Speaking of graves, one of the greatest hypocrisies of the Jewish elite was their reverence for the tombs of the prophets of old.
* They decorated the burial places of the prophets to honor their memory.
* Keep in mind, these were the prophets of God who had been killed and persecuted by the rebellious Jews of generations past.
* Jesus calls those Jews the “fathers” of the Pharisees and scribes.
* The Pharisees and scribes maintained if the prophets had lived during their time they would never treat them so poorly.
  + Jesus calls their bluff.
  + Jesus was the fulfillment of all that the prophets had spoken of and they were preparing, even then, to kill Him.
* The past hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes and their future support of the murder of Christ was evidence against them that they were no different than their wicked fathers.
* They resisted God in the past and they were resisting Him again.
* Verse 32 may be eluding to the punishment of God on the Jews in the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem.
  + Jesus presents a cup partially filled.
  + He tells the Pharisees they would fill it up.
  + The cup seems to represent the patience and tolerance of God with their wicked nation.
  + Once the cup was filled, the wrath, which had so patiently been held back by God, would be poured out on Jerusalem.

Mat 23:33 - You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

Mat 23:34 - Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town,

Mat 23:35 - so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

Mat 23:36 - Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

* Part of the process of filling the cup of God’s wrath was the murder of Jesus, but in addition to killing the Son of God, they would fill the cup to the brim as they killed and persecuted those who preached Jesus following His return to heaven.
* If you are familiar with Old Testament language, the phrase “prophets and wise men and scribes” probably has you thinking about those who came before Christ, but here Jesus uses those terms to refer to those who would follow Him.
  + Jesus used the term “scribes” to refer to His disciples in Matthew 13:52.
  + Paul talks about gifts of prophecy in the Church in 1Corinthians 12:10.
    - Today, when we think about the word “prophecy” we almost always interpret it to be a prediction of the future.
    - But a prophet in the Old Testament was one who brought the message of God to the people (not always a fortune teller type).
    - Prophecy in the New Testament, in part, would have been the transmission of God’s instruction to the Church.
  + “Wise men” is a term which can be applied to people of the Old and New Testament alike.
* The violent actions of the Jewish nation would seal their fate and their punishment would include, not only their guilt for persecuting Christ and His First Century followers, but their complicit guilt for the deaths of every righteous person from Abel to Zechariah.
  + The use of Abel and Zechariah is meant to sum up all history prior to Christ.
    - Abel was the son of Adam and Even.
    - Zechariah was a prophet towards the end of the Old Testament.
  + This was not a condemnation on every Jew.
  + Some Jews did accept Jesus and they entered the Kingdom of Heaven.
  + Jesus is speaking here about the collective Jewish nation and their widespread rebellion against God.
* In verse 36, they were told these crimes and judgements would come on “this generation.”
  + It was 30-33 A.D. when Jesus spoke these words.
  + It would only be 37-40 years before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman Empire (70 A.D.).

Mat 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!

Mat 23:38 - See, your house is left to you desolate.

Mat 23:39 - For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

* Have you ever heard a preacher preach a condemning fire-and-brimstone sermon and act like he enjoyed it?
  + Did he enjoy preaching people into hell?
  + Jesus wasn’t a preacher like that.
  + He mourned over the state of the Jewish nation.
* God doesn’t get any pleasure out of watching wicked people die.
  + Eze 33:11 - Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?
  + APPLICATION:
    - We should be careful about the way we condemn others.
    - First, we need to recognize it isn’t based on our authority.
    - Second, we should check our hearts to ensure we aren’t condemning others to make ourselves feel better about ourselves (virtue signaling). We are saved by the grace of God and not our self-righteousness.
    - Third, we shouldn’t find pleasure in telling people God will send them to hell. If you thank God at night for saving you and then turn around and get enjoyment from telling someone they are lost, you’ve got issues!
* A mother hen will gather her little chicks under her wings to protect them from danger.
* God had stood at the ready throughout the Jew’s history to provide them with protection and care but they would not return to Him.
* Verse 38 is probably referring to the Temple.
  + The Temple had been the house in which the presence of God dwelt.
  + It was the place to which the people could return to find the protection of God’s wings.
  + But no longer!
  + Rather than being referred to as the “LORD’s house,” Jesus here refers to it as their house.
  + The house was desolate, abandoned, empty.
  + Jesus knew the wicked direction they would take. God had drawn back His wings of protection and was preparing to pour out His judgement.
* Verse 39, what does it mean?
  + If you remember, the statement “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” had been shouted by the people during Jesus’ triumphal entry (Matthew 21:9).
  + The condemned Jews would not see Jesus again until they were ready to make the same confession.
  + There are several theories as to the meaning of this verse but I think it is probably referring to Jesus’ second coming.
    - When will all the Jews confess Christ?
    - On the Judgement Day when all bow before the exalted Christ

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Sabbath-made-for-man.html>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tefillin>

<https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Menachot.4.1>

<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/woe>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tekhelet>

<http://www.kosmosdalebaptistchurch.org/but-didnt-paul-call-himself-father-2/>

Albert Barnes Commentary on the New Testament

Bob Winton Commentary on Matthew

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-attitudes-toward-proselytes/>

<https://www.emethatorah.com/blog/2016/october-10/whitewashed-tombs>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woes_of_the_Pharisees>

<https://pushpay.com/blog/20-bible-verses-about-tithing/>