

Week 24

Ministry of Jesus: The Kingdom views

Matthew 23: Which kingdom are you in?

I sound like a broken record. All through this study I keep on skipping back to the message of this book. Matthew is a template for learning how to be Christian. It is far more than just a story of Jesus. Matthew 23 is like a line in the sand. Till now, you have been given a template how to pray, give, and understand the kingdom. Matthew now is making you chose sides. The religious rulers use religion to look good. They use it like power to maintain the religious institutional order. That is not Christianity.

I came into the church with absolutely no knowledge of religion. I may have mentioned I hated Christians years ago. The church preaches repentance. It preaches forgiveness. Yes, it preaches Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Yet, the church has become the very thing they read about. I have seen the church be protectionist instead of helping others. I have witnessed bad behavior ignored because we are commanded to love. When the institution is more important than the people, we have a problem.

All through this book we have witnessed Jesus argue about honoring parents over the law. We have Jesus being attacked for healing on a commanded day off. He is chastised for eating, drinking, and for who he associates with. Many people criticize the church because it appears not to care. The institution comes first. Sure, there are always critics. Yes, but I believe there is some truth in everything. So many won't come to church. Why? Maybe we look clean, act clean, appear clean, but non-believers are not as stupid as we assume. They have eyes, ears, and hearts too. Everyone sins, but Christian people need to repent too. How do you feel about this?

Matthew 23:3 **"So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach."**

2 Kings 8:46 **"When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) and You are angry with them and deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near."**

It seems that I harp on bashing church. It's just that this place is supposed to be the best of the best. At times it's the worst of the worst. Why? Matthew 23 let's us see into why. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. To wield the power of God. To be ordained by a powerful God might make you feel powerful. Jesus went out of his way to tell his followers to be servants first. This chapter unravels because the religious rulers held God over them like a club.

People paint Jesus as soft skinned. He is meek, timid, and calm in speech. Read this chapter twice. Is that the Jesus you see? He systematically throws the current church leadership under the bus. He would not get away with that in church circles today. This book is a warning. It's also a chance to do better with the power of God. What things make a good Christian?

Matthew 23:26 **"Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."**

Philippians 2:8 **"And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death-- even death on a cross."**

Jesus had compassion. Jesus would sacrifice himself. He was honest, direct, and opinionated. People tend to blast people with those traits. Give a white lie to save face. Don't be honest because honesty is too harsh at times. Never ever criticize because it is not nice. All of these attributes come from Jesus because he said them, right? Actually, we have taken it too far. We are nice to avoid honesty. We avoid true companionship. Why ruffle feathers. Jesus had no issue with ruffling feathers. Oh, that was Jesus so he had a right. So, we follow Jesus and live by his examples as long as they appear holy and nice. There is no room for throwing the church under the bus. That is why Christianity struggles. The lack of honesty.

This chapter paints two pictures. One side is the religious people and their institution. Jesus would never crush his own house, right? Ever seen a church close? Ever read of a pastor falling from grace? God has no issue with throwing bad Christianity under the bus. The idea of turning the other cheek has given rise to a corrupt church. I feel the Christian life is chaotic, harsh, and brutally honest. Why? Repentance from sin is harsh, brutally honest, and chaotic. Matthew 23 is not for the fluffy cheek turners.

The other side is looking at the reverse. If Jesus is throwing them under a large bus, then why? Maybe all their knowledge, flash, and arrogance are what we could become of we let it. Maybe the disciples arguing over who will sit next to Jesus needed to be nipped in the bud. Maybe baring children from Jesus needed to be dealt with harshly. I am sure Jesus saw it within his own followers.

Matthew 23:37 **"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."**

Matthew 5:20 **"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."**

Read Matthew 23. I would also like you to read Matthew 5. For extra read Psalm 118. The theme is acknowledging God and giving him praise. Matthew 23 is a dark warning of what happens when that stops.

1. If you were going to bash someone, would you do it in public? How about in front of your peers? What if your enemies were standing there also? Would you, could you throw someone under the bus? Jesus begins chapter 23 with a massive bang. He had stood on the mount of olives and gave his beatitudes about the kingdom. Who might enter?

The timeline in the Bible is tough to navigate. Right before Matthew 23 we have Jesus having a deep discussion with religious rulers presumably in the temple court. Then in Matthew 24 it says he left the Temple. So, did Jesus give Matthew 23 in the temple? Maybe he was back on the mount of olives? The first twelve verses of this chapter answer the “who can enter the kingdom” question. Not the religious rulers of that day.

A couple of things. One is the chair of Moses. It’s like calling your sister “your highness.” It’s sarcastic, flipped, and antagonistic. It’s meant to drive home a point. It’s also to provoke. Just try and call your sister that. Jesus begins with the chair of Moses for a reason. I’m sure it got everyone’s attention. Oh, boy, this will be good. To squish these 12 verses into a nut shell. Jesus is pointing out all that he has observed from the leaders (representatives) of his current church. Those who exalt themselves in any form will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 23: 5 “Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long.”

Matthew 6:3 “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,”

2. If you knew that people hated you, would you poke the bear? Matthew 13-36 pokes the bear bigtime. They call it the seven woes. It appears to alternate between woe to you scribes and Pharisees and blind guides. Jesus does not say. “oh, some are not being nice.” No, he goes right after them. Jesus forgot to turn the cheek. Remember the 11th commandment? Oh, right there is no turn the cheek commandment. Yet, church leaders say that we must treat all people with respect, reverence, and humbleness. Even if they are bad people.

It’s not that I’m saying you should go out and bash those on your list. I would equally say that we all have a list. What I’m driving at is there is a time and place for everything. These men were ruining the good name of God. Today people don’t come to church for the very same reasons. Maybe it’s time for the church to clean house and maybe get a little feisty.

Think about it. Jesus names his adversaries and calls them out. He also calls them blind guides. Earlier he accused them of following the men of the past who killed the prophets of God. They said no they did not. So, Jesus says in verse 34 that God will send more (John the Baptist) among them. That includes Jesus and Stephan in the book of Acts. They will kill the very thing sent from God.

Matthew 23:32 “Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!”

Matthew 23:36 **“Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.”**

Revelation 18:5-6 **“for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. 6 Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Pour her a double portion from her own cup”**

3. Patrick, this is a Bible study. We are to teach the word of God and promote the church. Just be positive about Christianity. We are Jesus followers for heavens sake. I have a sick stomach reading this chapter. Who wants to cut off the hand that helped me? The church has been very good to me. I have seen heartless blood spilled on the pews too (metaphorical). Yet, my own Bible calls this chapter a warning. If you don't believe Matthew then who? If you don't believe the heading in the Bible then who?

Matthew places this chapter here not to rub the religious rulers in their own mire. No, you miss the point. We are those potential religious rulers. You might become one. Matthew is saying: be a good one. The remaining three verses 37-39 are huge. Jesus is standing before Jerusalem. God had plans. They were his chosen children. Yet, they had gone astray. Will you go astray?

I have seen Christianity gone bad. I have often wondered what I would have been like if I had always been a Christian. I know both the saved and unsaved. I get both sides. I believe Matthew is thinking the same way. This book has come all this way. We have why God made creation. We have why and how Jesus came. We have doctrine. Now we have the pitfalls of religion. This story is ending soon. The placement of this chapter is intentional. If Jesus stood before you years from now. What will he be saying?

Matthew 23: 38 **“Look, your house is left to you desolate.”**

Matthew 25: 23 **“His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’”**

4. Ok, let's recount this chapter with fresh eyes. I want you to read it again. This time write down the opposite. Write down who in this era Jesus could be talking to. If Matthew was writing this today, to whom would be the readers? Notice a few things. There is condemnation for bad Christian leadership. Jesus: however; does not blatantly throw them under the bus. He does not say they are going to hell. He does not say he hates them. If you read the last three verses, Jesus is in pain for this lost generation.

It appears he is condemning them, but those last lines tell a different story. Nobody is angry enough to kill. Well almost nobody. Most people want answers. They want peace, happiness and understanding. When we lash out and get frustrated it's because of strain, conflict, and misunderstanding. In a way this is a lament. Jesus is crying out loud for them to stop.

Matthew 23: 16-17 **“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.’ 17 You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?”**

Revelation 18: 15-17 **“They will weep and mourn 16 and cry out: “Woe! Woe to you, great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!17 In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!”**

What it means?

Throughout this whole study I have warned you to not read this as a story. I have warned you not to read this as law. Far too many people have taken the Bible slightly to literal and way too far. Jesus sets the bar. A bar we cannot reach. Yet, God places paths before us. So often people say walk with Jesus. That means we *walk with*. In reference to the Holy Spirit, he dwells inside us. Some of the wording is walking beside us. Jesus sent this Spirit to do both.

Usually when religion goes astray, it's because the Spirit is absent. The Bible talks at length about being continually filled with the Spirit. It's not gas. It's not power. It's a relationship with the one you love. The one who loves you. Being around good people rubs off on you. God in the Old testament is constantly asking his people to come back. The last three verses in Matthew 23 are crying out the same thing.

We most certainly can go wrong. I have read many a story of very good pastors that lost their way. I bet the church became too big. Their ministry became too big. They lost sight of why they believed in the first place. To the new Christian, I would shout this out. Go back and re-read your Bible. Collect verses that help you remember the path you're on. Some verses mean something in a moment of happiness or crisis. Never forget them. Never forget where you have come from. Matthew 23 is not just a warning. It's an opportunity to stay on the path God placed you on. Don't make your own path.

Matthew 23:3 **“So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.”**

Romans 13:11 **“And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”**