

WARNINGS AND WOES

MATTHEW 23



A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Warnings and Woes: Matthew 23
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Matthew 23: Introduction

As the final week of His earthly ministry continued, Jesus unleashed a torrent of warnings and woes against the religious leaders of His day.

They were hypocrites and blind guides. They had failed in their service to the people of God, and His house had become desolate because of them. These denunciations, done openly and in public, would have further strengthened the resolve of the religious leaders to be done with Jesus, once and for all.

But they also would have resonated with the people, who knew that what Jesus was saying was true, but who would not dare to have voiced such thoughts aloud. Once, however, they saw their leaders for what they really were, their hearts may have been made ready for the true Leader and Savior.

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We hope you find this study of Ecclesiastes a challenging and stretching experience of journeying more deeply into the Word of God. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Greatness Clarified

Pray Psalm 56.10-13.

In God (I will praise *His* word),
In the LORD (I will praise *His* word),
In God I have put my trust;
I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?
Vows *made* to You *are binding* upon me, O God;
I will render praises to You,
For You have delivered my soul from death.
Have You not *kept* my feet from falling,
That I may walk before God
In the light of the living?

Sing Psalm 56.10-13

(Morecambe: [*Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart*](#))

I will not fear what foes might do to me.
I give You thanks, my vows will I renew.
You have redeemed me, set my spirit free,
and ever in Your light I'll walk with You.

Read and meditate on Matthew 23.1-12.

Prepare.

1. What did Jesus say about the scribes and Pharisees?
2. Who is the greatest among the followers of Christ?

Meditate.

The religious leaders had tried to embarrass and silence Jesus, even though the masses welcomed Him as the Son of David and Bringer of salvation. They thought they were great and could easily rid themselves of Jesus. Now Jesus, speaking “to the multitudes”, puts the religious leaders in their place.

The scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites and blind guides. They had the authority of those charged with teaching and interpreting the Law of God (“Moses’ seat”, v. 2), but they used their position of authority abusively. They taught rigid strictures, but lived loose lives. They required of others things they weren’t even willing to do themselves (v. 4). To the extent that they actually taught the Law of Moses, they were to be heard and obeyed (v. 3). But their example was not one the people should follow (vv. 3, 4). They used their position as religious leaders to make names for themselves, that others might esteem and defer to them (vv. 5-7).

Jesus reset the focus for the multitudes: True religion is about God the Father and Jesus Christ, the true Teacher of Israel (vv. 8, 9). Only Jesus can teach the Word of God truly; and only God the Father can make us His adopted sons and daughters (Jn. 1.12). Religious leaders who seek to use God for their own advantage are to be deplored.

And Jesus is winding up to do just that.

What should we do then? Serve one another in love, Jesus said (vv. 11, 12). Humble yourself; look for opportunities to serve; and give yourself to others for their edification. This is the way to greatness in the Kingdom of heaven and God. Others may not recognize that greatness, but God your Father and Jesus your Teacher will. And in the end, that's really all that matters.

Reflect.

1. Jesus honored "Moses' seat". What does this teach us about the Law of God?
2. Why did He denounce the religious leaders? How can we know when we're trying to *use* God rather than *serve* Him?
3. What does it mean to say that "One is your Teacher, the Christ"? How should this guide our reading and study of Scripture?

Whoever ministers with the divine word does not put himself forward to be called "teacher," for he knows that when he performs well it is Christ who is within him. He should only call himself "servant" according to the command of Christ, saying, "Whoever is greater among you, let him be the servant of all." Origen (185-254), Commentary on Matthew 12

Use me as Your servant today, Lord. Give me boldness to stand for Your truth as I...

Pray Psalm 56.1-9.

Let the boldness of Jesus be with you today as you seek opportunities to stand for His truth and proclaim His love.

Sing Psalm 56.1-9.

Psalm 56.1-9 (Morecambe: [*Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart*](#))

Savior, be gracious, gracious unto me!
Weary, I seek the shelter of Your wings.
Till trouble passes, till my sighings flee,
I seek the Lord Who for me does all things.

When I'm afraid I'll put my trust in You,
You, Lord, Whose everlasting Word I praise;
I will not fear what foes to me might do,
but will in faith to You my crying raise.

Wickedly how my foes distort my words;
constant attacks and snares await my way.
Pour out Your wrath, consume them, mighty Lord!
Bring evil to its end, O Lord, I pray!

Lord, see my wand'rings, see my anxious tears!
Help me to trust and praise Your holy Word.
Gladly I know that when I call You hear;
I will not fear but trust in You, O Lord.

2 Hypocrites! (1)

Pray Psalm 2.7, 8.

“I will declare the decree:
The LORD has said to Me,
‘You *are* My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
Ask of Me, and I will give *You*
The nations *for* Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.”

Sing Psalm 2.7, 8.

(Agincourt: [*O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High*](#))

Proclaim the message far and wide, that God has exalted the Crucified!
From heav’n He sent us His only Son, Who has for us salvation won!

Read Matthew 23.1-15; meditate on verses 13-15.

Prepare.

1. Why did Jesus call the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites?
2. Jesus invoked “woe” on them. What does that mean?

Meditate.

The basic meaning of “hypocrite” is “insincere.” A hypocrite is one who is only superficially what he professes to be. He makes a good show of faith in certain ways; but his heart produces actions which are merely self-serving, and thus betrays his confession.

It's about the worst thing you could say of someone for whom religion is his calling card, badge of honor, and status symbol.

Why were the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites? Three things are in view here. First, while they frequently talked about the Kingdom of God – the Davidic kingdom – they refused to enter it themselves when the opportunity – in the form of the Son of David and King of Israel – presented itself. And worse, they discouraged others from entering the Kingdom – from believing in and following Jesus (v. 13)

Second, they took advantage of the weak for their own aggrandizement, even as they assumed the posture of shepherds of the weak (v. 14).

Third, they devoted themselves to making sure that people followed them and believed just like they did, except that they actually expected conformity to practices they were not willing to keep themselves (v. 15).

For all such hypocrites, Jesus pronounced “Woe!” Woe implies judgment leading to rejection and misery. And when you’re saying this to the *leaders* of the people, *in the presence of the people*, you’re asking for trouble.

And the scribes and Pharisees were willing to give it.

Reflect.

1. How might you be able to tell if there is any hypocrisy in your faith?
2. How can believers encourage one another to enter more fully into the Kingdom of God?
3. Is there a place for “woe” in sharing the Good News of the Kingdom? Explain.

Here he lays to the charge of the priests two things. First, that they have been unprofitable for the salvation of many. They have forgotten that they need much toil in order to win over even one. And second, that they were remiss in the preservation of those whom they had won. Not only were they careless but traitors. John Chrysostom (344-407), The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 73.1

Lord, let there be no hypocrisy in me; instead, help me to...

Pray Psalm 2.1-6, 9-12.

Devote your day to Jesus, to live for Him in all faithfulness and sincerity.

Sing Psalm 2.1-6, 9-12.

Psalm 2.1-6, 9-12 (Agincourt: [*O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High*](#))

Why do the nations vainly rage, conspiring together from age to age?

Earth's kings and all of their counselors stand against the Lord and His Right Hand:

“Now let us cast His yoke below, His Kingdom authority overthrow!
Throw off His Law, reject His Word; no more be governed by this Lord!”

The Lord in heaven laughs in wrath at all who embark on this cursed path.
His angry Word to them is plain: “Yet shall My King in Zion reign!”

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace, and worship before His exalted face!
Beware His anger and judgment grim: How blessed are all who rest in Him!

3 Blind Guides!

Pray Psalm 19.12-14.

Who can understand his errors?
Cleanse me from secret faults.
Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins;
Let them not have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
And I shall be innocent of great transgression.
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

Sing Psalm 19.12-14.

(St. Christopher: [*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*](#))

Who, Lord, can know his errors? O keep sin far from me!
Let evil rule not in my soul that I may blameless be.
O let my thoughts, let all my words, before Your glorious sight
Be pleasing to You, gracious Lord, acceptable and right!

Read Matthew 23.1-22; meditate on verses 16-22.

Prepare.

1. Why did Jesus say that the religious leaders of His day were “blind guides”?
2. Where were these guides leading the people? Where should they have been leading them?

Meditate.

Make sure you know where the guides you follow are leading.

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day had the wrong focus. Because they had the wrong focus, they led the people away from God and His Kingdom, rather than into it (v. 13). The scribes, Pharisees, and other religious leaders practiced a “this-worldly” faith. They valued the gold of the temple more than the God of the temple; the gifts given to God rather than the God Who received them; and the place of God’s dwelling instead of the God Who dwelled in that place.

Their focus and priorities were on the *means* of faith, rather than faith’s true *object*. If we translate this situation into our terms, we’d say these leaders were more concerned about having the right building, the best worship band, the most programs, and a reliable revenue stream, rather than God and His glory. What the leaders of Jesus’ day invested their efforts in, and encouraged the people to focus on, fell short of God and His glory. And to fall short of these, no matter how noble our aspirations may be, is to fall into sin (Rom. 3.23).

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were “blind guides”, not because they could not *see*, but because they were aiming at the wrong goals and leading the people to do the same.

Make sure you’re aiming at God and His glory, and not lesser things.

Reflect.

1. How can you know when you have begun to lose the true focus of your faith?
2. What should you do when that happens?
3. What can you do to keep your focus on Christ and His Kingdom and glory?

One who seeks to be religious should anchor himself rightly in the truth. They were stupid and blind who venerated gifts that were sanctified while they allowed sanctity itself to pass by. Hilary of Poitiers (315-367), On Matthew 24.6

Lord, help me to set You always before me, so that I...

Pray Psalm 19.1-11.

The world and Word of God reveal His glory. Aim to see Him in these, and to live for His glory in all you do today.

Sing Psalm 19.1-11.

Psalm 19.1-11 (St. Christopher: [*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*](#))

The heav'ns declare God's glory, the skies His work proclaim!
From day to day and night by night they shout His glorious Name!
No speech, no words, no voice is heard, yet all across the earth,
the lines of His all-present Word make known His holy worth.

Behold, the sun arises, a bridegroom strong and bright,
rejoicing as he runs his course from morning unto night.
From east to west across the skies his circuit he completes,
and none can hide their sinful eyes or shelter from his heat.

The Law of God is perfect, His testimony sure;
the simple man God's wisdom learns, the soul receives its cure.
God's Word is right, and His command is pure, and truth imparts;
He makes our eyes to understand; with joy He fills our hearts.

The fear of God is cleansing, forever shall it last.
His judgments all are true and just, by righteousness held fast.
O seek them more than gold most fine, than honey find them sweet;
be warned by every word and line; be blessed with joy complete.

4 Hypocrites! (2)

Pray Psalm 91.1-3.

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD, “*He is my refuge and my fortress;*
My God, in Him I will trust.”
Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler
And from the perilous pestilence.

Sing Psalm 91.1-3.

(Lauda Anima: [*Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*](#))

All who dwell within God’s shelter in His shadow will reside.
He our Tow’r, our Fortress ever, in Him we our trust confide.
From the trapper’s snares He saves us; safe from sickness we abide.

Read Matthew 23.1-30; meditate on verses 23-30.

Prepare.

1. Why were the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites?
2. Which matters more, what’s inside us or what we show on the outside?

Meditate.

Jesus returned to the “hypocrites” theme in these verses. Here He pointed out that their hypocrisy was in parading an outward appearance that wasn’t matched by the inner reality of their souls.

The scribes and Pharisees might have wondered to themselves, “How does *He* know?” Jesus knows what’s in every person (Jn. 2.24, 25). The religious leaders were big on the outward show – tithing down to the smallest detail (v. 23), parading their righteousness (vv. 25, 27, 28), and pretending to deplore the sinful actions of their forebears (vv. 29, 30) – but inwardly, their lives were lawless, self-serving, and bloodthirsty.

We can imagine the religious leaders becoming increasingly furious at this dressing-down from One they considered to be unschooled and uncredentialed. But everyone knew it was true. When religion makes outward appearance the main issue, and neglects the cleansing and nurture of the soul, works righteousness is what you get. And works righteousness is not righteousness at all.

Jesus’ view has not changed from then to now. We need to make sure that our hearts are submissive to God’s Word (v. 23), and not just so that we can flout our so-pure doctrine before the uninitiated (v. 24). Daily cleansing of the soul involves waiting on the Spirit, confessing our sins, and repenting of everything that is contrary to God’s Law (Ps. 139.23, 24; 1 Jn. 1.8, 9; Ps. 119.59, 60). A clean soul is not just one swept of wickedness, but one that is filled with the furnishings of God’s Word and fullness of His Spirit (v. 28; cf. Ps. 119.9-11; Eph. 5.18-21). And a soul rightly-attuned to Jesus knows that we’re all always capable of the worst sins we can imagine (v. 30).

It is hypocrisy to try to be a Christian from the outside-in. Take care of the inside of your life, and the outside will fall nicely into step with the way of Jesus.

Reflect.

1. What are the most important disciplines for growing your soul? Where do you need to improve in the use of these?
2. Why is outward “righteousness” not enough to fulfill our callings as disciples of Jesus?
3. How can believers help one another to follow Jesus from the inside-out?

Hypocrisy, because it is a counterfeit of the good, possesses nothing vital of the good it simulates, but is only its dead bones, so to speak.... If we listen with wisdom to what the present passage wants to tell us, we will understand that every simulated righteousness is a dead righteousness, hence no righteousness at all. Origen (185-254), Commentary on Matthew 24

Cleanse me within and without, Lord, so that today I will follow You as I...

Pray Psalm 91.4-16.

Shelter in the Lord as you pray about the day ahead. Seek His Presence and help to live as His follower in everything you do.

Sing Psalm 91.4-16.

Psalm 91.4-16 (Lauda Anima: [*Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*](#))

He will shade us with His pinions, 'neath His wings we safety find,
from night's terror, from day's arrow, from the fears that stalk our mind.
When destruction falls at noon time, safe in Him shall we abide.

Thousands at our sides may falter – it will not to us come near!
We instead shall see the end of all who at God's mercy sneer.
Evil shall no more befall us for we hold the Lord most dear.

He shall give His angels charge to bear us up, lest we should fall;
they will guard and carry all who on the Savior's mercy call.
Cobra, mighty lion, serpent: We shall tread upon them all!

Save us, Lord! We love You only; set us up secure on high!
You we know, on You we call in trouble: Hear us when we cry!
Show us Your salvation, let long life forever satisfy!

5 Witness against Themselves

Pray Psalm 58.1, 2.

Do you indeed speak righteousness, you silent ones?
Do you judge uprightly, you sons of men?
No, in heart you work wickedness;
You weigh out the violence of your hands in the earth.

Sing Psalm 58.1, 2.

(Arlington: [*This is the Day the Lord Has Made*](#))

Do you indeed speak righteousness, you rulers of the earth?
And do you judge the sons of men according to their worth?

No, not at all, but in their hearts they seek unrighteous ways;
Their hands weigh out upon the earth cruel violence all their days.

Read Matthew 23.1-36; Meditate on verses 31-36.

Prepare.

1. What did the religious leaders “witness” about themselves?
2. What did Jesus call on them to do?

Meditate.

Jesus had taught His followers that they would be able to tell the true convictions and beliefs of people by what came out in their lives (Matt. 7.20). Our works say more about who we are than what we *say* about who we are and what we believe.

In the case of the religious leaders of His day, Jesus said they were the heirs and offspring of those who had “murdered the prophets” (v. 31). He knew where their hostility would lead, so He called on them to show their true selves and “Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ *guilt*” (v. 32). He called on them to do to Him what He had already prophesied in the parable of the vineyard (Matt. 21.33-39).

I wonder how they felt, knowing that Jesus knew what was in store for Him – what *they* were planning – and yet He faced them unruffled and unflinching. Were they, indeed, condemning themselves to hell, as He insisted (v. 33)? Count on it, at least as long as they held on to their rebellion. Many of those whom Jesus confronted during this last week of His life would ultimately repent and believe in Him (cf. Acts 6.1-6). For now, His angry, penetrating words must have set at least some of them wondering about the question, “How shall you escape the condemnation of hell?”

All who oppose the Word of God are children of the great serpent (vv. 33-35). They show by their works, by their outward opposition to the Gospel, that they are the offspring of Satan, the father of lies (Jn. 8.44). Their works bear witness to the hatred of God in their hearts; and all that Jesus had declared concerning them – including being cast into hell – would certainly come to pass (v. 36).

As a quaint saying has it, “Your talk talks, and your walk talks; but your walk talks more than your talk talks.” To what do the works of your life bear witness?

Reflect.

1. Why did Jesus seem to emphasize outward works so much?
2. What do you want your works to witness about you?
3. How can Christians encourage one another to live as witnesses for Christ?

Just as not all who call upon the Lord are of the Lord but only those who do his will, neither does everyone who extols the apostles, prophets and martyrs thereby venerate them, but only those who imitate their works and hold their faith.
Anonymous, *Incomplete Work on Matthew, Homily 45*

Let my walk and talk complement each other today, O Lord, so that I...

Pray Psalm 58.3-11.

Pray for those who are enemies of the Lord, that God will open their hearts to His truth, deliver them from their sins, and join them with us in Jesus.

Sing Psalm 58.3-11.

Psalm 58.3-11 (Arlington: [*This is the Day the Lord Has Made*](#))

The wicked from the womb rebel; from birth they utter lies.

Their tongues of serpent's venom tell; all truth their ears despise.

Break, shatter, and destroy them, Lord; dissolve them from the day.

Consume them by Your mighty Word; and sweep them all away.

The righteous will rejoice to see the vengeance of the Lord.

All men will say, "Then God must be, the righteous to reward."

6 Not Willing

Pray Psalm 142.5, 6.

I cried out to You, O LORD:
I said, “You *are* my refuge,
My portion in the land of the living.
Attend to my cry,
For I am brought very low;
Deliver me from my persecutors,
For they are stronger than I.

Sing Psalm 142.5, 6.

(Dix: [*For the Beauty of the Earth*](#))

Hear my cry, Lord, I am low! They are strong who seek my soul.
Jesus frees from every foe; He will keep and make me whole!

Refrain

Lord, You are my Refuge strong!
O receive my plaintive song.

Read Matthew 23.1-39; meditate on verses 37-39.

Prepare.

1. Why did “Jerusalem” not take refuge in Jesus?
2. What terms of deliverance from desolation did Jesus offer?

Meditate.

Jerusalem here stands as a symbol for the Jewish people. Chosen by God and delivered from captivity in Egypt, Israel’s history with God was checkered, brief seasons of covenant faithfulness interspersing a more general and steady decline from the Lord. As Jesus had already explained, the extent of Israel’s rebellion could be seen in the way they treated the messengers God sent to them: mocking and imprisoning some, stoning others, rejecting most of them.

Notice how Jesus assumed the first-person here: “I wanted to gather your children together...” (v. 37). He was the Word in the mouths of those prophets, as well as the One Who sent them.

Throughout the course of His earthly sojourn, Jesus worked to help the people of Israel see that He is the Promised One of Whom all the prophets had spoken; but “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (Jn. 1.11).

The problem was not that the people of Israel were sufficiently comfortable and happy in the present state of oppression under the Romans. The problem was not that Jesus did not make it clear that He was the Promised One. The problem was not that He didn’t provide enough evidence to convince people that He was the long-awaited Messiah. The problem was that the people to whom Jesus came “were not willing” to receive Him. The result would be that they would be consigned to desolation (v. 38) – a barren, unfruitful desert (Greek: ἔρημος, *eremos*, desert).

This is the case for anyone who refuses to take refuge in Jesus. Every human being is endowed with rich potential to be a fruitful source of love, help, righteousness, and blessing to the world. But apart from Jesus, human life is a desert. And even those who profess to know and believe in Jesus will not

bear the fruit He expects unless they abide in Him, instead of lingering in the fruitless wastes of our secular and narcissistic age (Jn. 15.1-5).

The remedy for barrenness is to come to Jesus and bless Him as Lord and Savior (v. 39) – to give your will over to Him in every facet and aspect of your life. He can make you willing to follow Him, so that you bear much fruit, and your fruit remains.

Reflect.

1. How can we become more willing to follow Jesus?
2. What kinds of things keep us from being willing to follow Jesus?
3. In what ways are you willing to follow Jesus today?

He indicates himself to be the very one expected by the prophets. This is why he uses the same words as did the prophets. In this way he intimated both his resurrection and his second coming. He made all this plain even to the utterly unbelieving but even more surely to all who would worship him. John Chrysostom (34-407), The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 74.3

Make me willing to follow You today, Lord, so that I...

Pray Psalm 142.1-4, 7.

Call on the Lord to strengthen your spirit, so that you are willing follow and serve Him throughout this day.

Sing Psalm 142.1-4, 7.

Psalm 142.1-4, 7 (Dix: [For the Beauty of the Earth](#))

With my voice, O Lord, I cry – hear my plea for mercy, Lord!
My complaint mounts up on high, bringing You my troubled word:

Refrain v. 5, 6

Lord, You are my Refuge strong!
O receive my plaintive song!

When my spirit faints away, You my falt'ring pathway know.
Where I take my journey they traps have hidden to my woe.

Refrain

Lord, look to my right and see: None takes notice of my plight.
Is there refuge left for me? Is my soul out of Your sight?

Refrain

Out of prison lead me, Lord; thanks and praise to You shall be.
Righteous men armed with Your Word Will Your grace bestow on me.

Refrain

7 The Desolate House

Pray Psalm 52.8, 9.

But I *am* like a green olive tree in the house of God;
I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.
I will praise You forever,
Because You have done *it*;
And in the presence of Your saints
I will wait on Your name, for *it is* good.

Sing Psalm 52.8, 9.

(Warrington: [*Give to Our God Immortal Praise*](#))

“But as for me may I be seen in God an olive ever green!
Ever in God, most kind and just, shall I with joy and gladness trust!”

Thanks evermore to our Savior be raised! His faithfulness be ever praised!
Here with Your people, loving God, I wait upon Your Name, so good!

Read and meditate on Matthew 23.1-39.

Prepare.

1. How did Jesus classify the religious leaders in this chapter?
2. Where did that leave the nation and people of God?

Meditate.

In Matthew 23, Jesus publicly and unflinchingly declared what all the people already knew but would not dare to speak: Their leaders were frauds – hypocrites, blind teachers, unreliable priests. Jesus waited throughout the entire course of His earthly ministry to unleash this torrent of criticism in the last days of His earthly sojourn. Why?

In just a few short days, the leaders would prove the truth of what Jesus declared in this chapter. True to their heritage, they would condemn and murder the Lord’s Messenger, His Son, the King of David’s kingdom. We cannot know what the impact of that treachery, combined with this teaching, might have been on the crowds who heard Jesus and witnessed His crucifixion. But we can certainly know what the impact of this teaching ought to be on us.

True faith begins on the inside, where we keep our souls clean through confession and repentance, and where the Word and Spirit of God work for our sanctification. Christian faith is not a patch-on religion. It is a religion of the whole person, beginning from within, where in heart, mind, and conscience we are devoted to Jesus; then issuing in good works of love for God and our neighbors.

The scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and lawyers of Israel knew nothing of such faith. Everything was about outward appearances, to effect outward deference, respect, and obedience on the part of the people. Did the crucifixion of Jesus serve to prove His assessment? And did seeing the way these leaders conspired to murder Jesus provoke and prepare the hearts of the multitude who came to faith in Him on the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2)?

We can’t know. But the lesson for us is clear: Guard against merely outward appearances! Love,

serve, and follow Jesus from the inside-out, and we will know the reality of full and abundant life in Him.

Reflect.

1. Why is hypocrisy so abhorrent to Jesus?
2. What are the keys to keeping from a life of mere outward appearances?
3. How should believers help one another to keep from hypocrisy?

Tell me, hypocrite, if it is so good to be good, why do you not strive to be truly what you only appear to be? And if it is so bad to be evil, then why do you allow yourself to be in truth what you would never want to appear to be? What appears to be ugly is even uglier in truth, but what is beautiful in appearance is much more beautiful in reality. Therefore either be what you appear to be or appear to be what you are. Anonymous, Incomplete Work on Matthew, Homily 45

Keep me from all hypocrisy, Lord, and help me always to...

Pray Psalm 52.1-7.

Pray that the Lord will be your strength throughout this day. Wait on Him to show you any sin in your life, then confess and repent accordingly.

Sing Psalm 52.1-7.

Psalm 52.1-7 (Warrington: [Give to Our God Immortal Praise](#))

Why do the mighty boast in sin? God's love endures, it knows no end!
They with their tongues vain boasts repeat, and like a razor, work deceit.

Men more than good in evil delight, and lies prefer to what is right.
They utter words, both harsh and strong, with their devouring, deceitful tongue.

God will forever break them down, uproot, and cast them to the ground!
He from their safety tears them away, no more to know the light of day.

The righteous see and laugh and fear, and say, "Behold, what have we here?
Such are all who at God conspire, and wealth and evil ways desire.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why were the religious leaders of Jesus' day hypocrites?
2. Why were they "blind guides"?
3. What was the effect of this corrupt leadership on the Lord's people?
4. How can we guard against being hypocrites and blind guides?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Matthew 23.1-39? How are you putting that lesson to work in your Personal Mission Field?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 360 Zephyr Road, Williston, VT 05495.

Thank you.