

Beginning With the Household of God

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading and we are in Matthew's Gospel this morning and we're in the latter chapters and Willie's going to be leading us through these over the coming weeks.

So Matthew chapter 23. I'll give you a moment to turn there. Matthew 23 and we're reading the whole chapter this morning.

So Jesus is addressing the crowds and also his disciples. Matthew 23 verse 1. Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat.

So practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice. 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.

They do all their deeds to be seen by others, for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. And they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.

[1 : 2 9] But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one father who is in heaven.

Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces.

Few neither enter yourselves nor allow those who had entered to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. Few 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. Woe to you, blind guides, who say, if anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing.

[2 : 4 0] But if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath. You blind fools. For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?

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. You blind men. For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

So whoever swears by the altar, swears by it and everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple, swears by it and by him who dwells in it.

And whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Lord, justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others.

[3 : 45] You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside the ingredient full of self-indulgence. You blind Pharisees, you blind Pharisee. First, clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

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.

So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, if we have lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets. Thus, you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murder the prophets.

[5 : 04] Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

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, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of the innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Barakai, whom you murdered, between the sanctuary and the altar.

Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not see your house is left to you desolate.

For I tell you, you will not see me from now on until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Amen. May God bless his words to us this morning. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Matthew chapter 23, the passage that Paul read for us a few moments ago.

[6 : 50] And in returning to Matthew's gospel today, we come to the last words of Jesus' public ministry that Matthew records for us. And these grim words are the last words that Jesus spoke in the temple, in the very center of Israel's worship.

They come after chapters 19 and 20, where Jesus presses home his unique authority on earth as Lord of all. And then chapter 21, remember, when his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, proclaimed as the son of David by the crowds, is the climax of all the expectation of the prophets of the Old Testament.

But even though the children sing with joy, Hosanna, God saves, the religious leaders of Israel, the clergy, the moderators and bishops, the professors of theology, they utterly reject him.

And in Matthew chapter 21, verse 32, Jesus says that just as they refused to believe John the Baptist, who spoke about Jesus the Christ, they refused also to believe the witness of Jesus himself.

They utterly rejected the son of God. And therefore, says Jesus, he will reject them to their eternal loss. And he tells them that in the vivid parable of the talents.

[8 : 19] Remember, who abused the messengers of the master and then kill and murder the son of the master. And therefore, they'll be punished, says Jesus, to destruction. Just so, chapter 21, verse 43, the kingdom of heaven will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

And then in chapter 22, the parable of the wedding feast drives it home. The scornful invitees to the wedding feast who refuse the invitation of God, they will be destroyed.

But instead, the banqueting house will be filled, but with outsiders, both good and bad, says Jesus, with everyone who will respond to that gracious call to come and feast with the king.

And then again, in chapter 22 there again, the whole religious establishment of Israel clashes with Jesus. We're told the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees, these were rival groups, by the way, but the one thing that united them was their hatred of the Son of God.

And Jesus says to them, these religious figures, you are wrong about everything. Chapter 22, verse 19, because he says, you know neither the Scriptures, the Word of God, or the power of God.

[9 : 42] In other words, they had the Bible, but they had totally lost the plot. Because they'd allowed their own earthbound religion to blind them totally to the whole message of the true gospel of the kingdom of God.

And it's a wonderful story of salvation for human beings. They knew plenty about the law of God, but absolutely nothing, says Jesus, about the lawgiver, about God himself.

Because they'd replaced him with a God of their own imaginations. A God who was actually made in their own image. And they're so blind that when God himself actually stood right in front of them on earth in the person of his Son, not only did they not recognize him, they hated him, they despised him.

Having received from God more light, more privilege than any other nation ever, despite that, they meet the true Messiah of God with scorn, with utter rejection.

They've refused the light of God, they've refused the spirit of God. And that is epitomized in their rejection of the Son of God himself.

[10 : 57] And so now, says Jesus, only judgment can remain. Because the gospel, you see, is a double-edged sword of division.

Remember Jesus' words back in the parables of Matthew 13. The purpose of his teaching in parables, he says, is to divide people. To those who hear and respond, remember Jesus said, more will be given.

To those who reject his word, even that which they have will be taken away. And here we see that judgment from the judge of all the earth, beginning with the household of God, with Israel herself.

and in laying out the appalling indictment here of Israel's sins and pronouncing his awful verdict, Jesus' words are recorded by Matthew for us today as an abiding warning for the New Testament church and indeed for every nation that's been privileged so greatly in having access to the light of God and the word of God.

It's a warning in our day, especially to the western church, especially also to our western culture because as Jesus says elsewhere in Luke chapter 12, from those to whom much was given, much will be required.

[12 : 26] Peter warns us, doesn't he, judgment begins with a household of God. So we need to take this chapter very seriously as a privileged church and as those who have lived in a very privileged culture.

First, in verses 1 to 33, we have Jesus' appalling indictment. And the bulk of the chapter sums up God's devastating charge against the religious establishment of Israel, which in spite of God's extraordinary patience, the repeated opportunities he's given them to repent, at last now it's gone too far.

And so in rejecting God himself in the flesh in the presence of his son, Israel's religion is simply confirmed for what in the main it seems to have been for most of them all along, just an empty sham.

Outwardly, all the temple and all of that, very impressive. But inwardly, in what matters, just empty. In fact, worse than empty, rotten to the core.

And you see, when religious institutions live like that, then and now, claiming God's name but refusing to submit to God's rule, well, he cannot, he will not remain in the midst forever.

[13 : 50] It's a very solemn message, but we can't ignore it. The first charge in verses 1 to 7 that Jesus begins to bring against Israel as a religious establishment is the charge of hypocrisy.

There's no real integrity in their profession and Jesus exposes their mockery of true kingdom living. Hypocrite, it's a word that occurs again and again all through the chapter to address the scribes and the Pharisees, the clergy, the leaders of Israel.

And in these first seven verses, you see, he shows what that means. At its root is a total misunderstanding of what real righteousness is, what it really means to be pleasing to God.

And they have no idea. They don't know because they don't know God. They don't listen to his words, which are all about revealing God himself so that people can know him.

See, to know God truly is to respond to his word, to his personal communication to us. And Jesus is so, so clear, isn't he, what that real response is.

[15 : 00] It's not saying Lord, Lord in the temple. It's doing the will of the Father in heaven, he says in the Sermon on the Mount. That's real God knowledge. That's real relationship with God.

It's doing the will of the Father in heaven that makes people my brother and my sister and my mother, he says in chapter 12. But look at verse 3 here, the scribes and the Pharisees, they preach, but they don't practice, they don't do.

They have no interest in doing the Father's will and really knowing the Father. So yes, Jesus says, heed what they tell you from Moses when it really is from Moses, the scriptures, not just their own traditions, but don't look to them for an example.

Because they're like that son in the parable in chapter 21, remember, full of pious talk. Oh yes, I'll go and do what you ask me, but then actually doesn't do anything at all. In the Father's vineyard. They're like the cursed fig tree in that chapter.

All sorts of impressive leaves, but not a single piece of fruit. They're hypocrites. They're just empty shells. There is no substance at all. And that's the real essence of hypocrisy.

[16 : 09] See, it's more than just saying one thing and doing another that our politicians seem to do all the time. It's deeper than just insincerity. Because these men actually thought themselves to be very pious and devoted.

But they were utterly self-deceived. They totally misunderstood the kind of righteousness that God really wants. The rightness of heart that God loves.

And the love that he wants from us. Because you see, they were utterly fixed on externals, the things of this world. And so fixed on the things of this world were they that they totally failed to see that what God wants is something far deeper.

God wants something everlasting. He wants the love of our hearts, of our soul, of our minds, everything. That's a great command that everything hangs on, said Jesus.

Back in chapter 22, verse 37. God wants the whole of us. He wants us to render to him what is his. Remember Jesus spoke about Caesar's image being on the coin.

[17 : 19] Well, give the coin back to him in tax. But give to God what is God's. That's what he wants. He wants you. His image in you.

But they'd never grasped that truth, the very heart of the Bible's revelation. That the Bible is a story all about God winning back his people through his mighty redeeming power.

A people who are lost to sin and to shame but to be brought back to truly love him. They missed totally the great eternal, the supernatural power of God for salvation, which is the very heart of the whole Bible story because they were just utterly earthbound.

And you see, earthbound mere religion has no power to save. No power to restore and transform people. It can burden people, that's what verse 4 says, with very heavy loads, all sorts of rituals and practices and religious observances.

But it can't do anything to relieve people of the real cares of eternity. The religion's whole focus is on this world and on this world's approval.

[18 : 32] Look at verse 5. It's about deeds which are seen by others. It's about all the virtue signaling of man-centered religion. You see, if you have no sense of what God's story is really about, which is not signaling your superiority to people in this world, but it's about finding salvation out of this world, this dying and decaying world, through resurrection, through the defeat of hell itself.

It's all about the glory of a new world. It's about a kingdom that will endure forever. But you see, without that, all you're left with is just earthbound religion. And so what matters is just what you have now.

The valuations of our peers, of the world, of ourselves. Not the true valuation, the only one that counts, which is the eternal kingdom of Christ, the Son of God.

So what kind of things become important in religion that's just natural, that's not supernatural and eternal, that's earthbound? Well, of course, it's human institutions and it's human things.

It's verse 6. Places of honor, at feasts, good seats, at all the best religious platforms. It's verse 8. Being known as a famous teacher with all sorts of influence.

[19 : 54] Or verse 5. Being known as a very pious prayer warrior with extra long tassels on your prayer shawl for good measure. Being seen to be really devoted and signed with an enormous Bible on your person.

That's what phylacteries were, quite literally. There were scriptures bound in boxes put on people's heads and around their arms. Moses says back in Deuteronomy chapter 6 that God's commands are to be like a sign on your hand and like frontlets between your eyes.

In other words, God's word should fill your head and it should be evident in all the works of your hands. But they made it into an absurdly literalistic observance. Actually wrapping scriptures, sticking them on their heads and on their arms.

What's actually ignoring in all of life what God wants to tell you through those scriptures about how to live. Phylacteries is here just a substitute for reality.

And that's the danger, isn't it, of all sorts of outward religious accoutrements. They might not be wrong in themselves, but religious symbolism very easily becomes just a religious substitute, doesn't it?

[21 : 06] You can wear a cross around your neck. You can even fight for the right to wear a cross around your neck. But actually, your heart can want nothing whatsoever to do with the real Jesus or his actual lordship over your life.

You can recite reformed confessions and catechisms too. You can be very proudly Protestant and yet actually have no love in your heart for the children of God and for brothers and sisters and for the lost.

We all need to be challenged, don't we, by verses 5 to 7 here. We're all very prone to wanting to do the things that make us seen by others. It's very interesting.

It's always much easier in church life to get volunteers for higher profile things than it is to get volunteers for the background things that absolutely nobody ever sees except for the Lord in heaven. We're like that.

And the same earthbound religion, you see, loves what verses 8 to 12 speak about, hierarchies. Jesus says there's no real humility in their profession of faith and he exposes their perversion of true kingdom authority which is the very antithesis of the heart of the true God of heaven who humbles himself to serve and to save his people.

[22 : 33] The earthbound religion is so taken up with traditions and with institutions and along with that always goes a focus on hierarchy because the way up and on in this world is up.

And so verse 8, people want to be called rabbi, literally my great one. Or verse 9, father. Or verse 10, instructor, teacher, master. Well, that's what establishment religion is always interested in, isn't it?

You see it very particularly in the fathers and the prince bishops of the Roman church but also in the reverends and the right reverends and the very reverends and all the rest of all of that sort of stuff that people love. All my friends have laughed their head off when I've had these interviews on the TV with Neil Oliver and he always calls me the reverend.

All my friends laugh their heads off and he says you should call you the irreverend. But it's a serious point, isn't it? Because churches have so often focused on pastors doing all sorts of useless academic studies which are no use at all to the well-being of the church to get titles, to get degrees so they can become recognized church leaders even though they know nothing about the scriptures and the power of God in many cases.

And that, friends, is what has destroyed the mainline churches in our nation. And similarly, another big part of the ruination of the national church in Scotland is that it's so often shooed into leadership and into eldership people just because they're great ones in the eyes of the world.

[24 : 15] Even though they've got absolutely no spiritual qualities at all. As though being a doctor or a bank manager or an accountant somehow qualifies you for leadership in the Christian church. You see, that way, that way of social and educational hierarchy is the way of this world.

It's the way of a fallen world. It is utterly earthbound thinking. But not so among you, said Jesus back in chapter 20.

It says it again here in verse 11. The greatest among you will be your servant. Because the way up in God's kingdom is down.

See, authority comes not by pulling rank. Authority in Christ's church is in his word of truth alone. We have one father. And our one father is in authority over every one of us.

And all of us bow to his word. We have one teacher and that is Christ. And as brothers and sisters we all bow to his word. And that's where true authority in Christ's church lies.

[25 : 22] In his word. And I don't misunderstand. Jesus, of course, is not saying that there should be no teaching office in the church. Of course not. He commands that. So do his apostles.

He's not saying that there should be no teaching office but he is saying that teachers don't have inherent authority and certainly not to lord it over anybody in the flock.

Because they too are brothers. They are under the same master's authority like everyone else. And that's why by the way in the New Testament there is so much focus on recognizing true teachers and distinguishing true ministry from false ministry.

because the true teacher teaches only the truth of God and applies it to himself just as much as to everybody else. Because we're all brothers and sisters.

And true ministry means that we're all under authority together and it's the authority of the word preached not the person who preaches it. And we must all remember that especially those who preach and teach.

[26 : 26] Otherwise look at verse 12. If we have too high a view of ourselves if we exalt ourselves God himself will humble us. That's a real warning isn't it? If we think we're indispensable God might very well have to show us we're not.

It's very easy for any leader in Christian work to foster a dependency culture so that everything hinges on me in my group or my church or my ministry.

I'm the linchpin without me everything will collapse. I knew a minister who did that in several different ministries and loved to tell people when he moved on to something else just how things did collapse when he moved on.

That's not how Jesus wants his kingdom or his church. And anyway it's not true. The truth is when somebody moves on in Christian leadership very quickly you see how utterly dispensable they were.

Nobody's indispensable. It's far better isn't it? Whatever our calling is whatever place we serve in in leadership to work to make ourselves utterly dispensable.

[27 : 33] That's real kingdom leadership. Not savoring hierarchy but showing humility in service. But it's at verse 13 that we get to the crux of it all really because the center of it all is not just hypocrisy it's not just the love of hierarchy but it is in the end just heartlessness.

In the seven woes that we have here in verses 13 to 33 Jesus accuses these people of having no real allegiance to God and he exposes their institutional religion as enshrining the very antithesis of true kingdom law because they've missed the very heart of the revelation that God has poured out to them again and again in the law and the prophets and the wise men of the Old Testament and now in the very presence of the Son of God himself.

And they've remained utter strangers despite all of that to the very heart of God himself. So instead of knowing him and loving him and reflecting his heart of love they are the very antithesis the opposite.

They're not truly holy they are unholy. They're heartless. These seven woes they're arranged symmetrically which is typical we're told of a Hebrew lament which is very opposite because it is lamentable.

There's three pairs working from the outside to the center and then there's a central woe in the pivot in verses 23 and 24. So let's take them in that order. First of all verse 13 the first woe and then the last woe in verses 29 to 33 they both speak of Israel's refusal of God's true gospel call to repentance and faith.

[29 : 24] Verse 13 they not only refuse to enter the kingdom themselves by humbling themselves by submitting to Jesus in penitent faith but they hinder others by opposing that true gospel of salvation at every turn.

what could be more perverse from people whose very job it was to teach the true gospel of God's truth. But you know there are many ordained today called reverend today very reverend right reverend and all the rest of it there are many today who will face that indictment from Christ on the last day.

but as verses 29 to 33 make clear it's always been that way. Yes he says you decorate the monuments of the prophets of the past but you are the true spawn of those very ones who murdered those prophets.

Nothing changes you see that's the truth. I was taught church history in theological faculty by those who reveled in talking about the reformation history in Scotland but who utterly opposed those who preached the reformers same evangelical gospel today.

I've listened to people who have extolled the illustrious history of the missionary movement from Scotland in the past and yet whose focus today is completely and utterly on interfaith services and so on the very antithesis of the very thing these missionaries gave their lives for.

[30 : 52] but you see establishment Israel as so often in establishment Christianity through the years refused the call of the true gospel of God to enter the kingdom how?

says Jesus through the narrow gate of real repentance and real faith and at the same time is refusing shut that door in others faces.

and Jesus said then and Jesus says now to those who do that woe to you. And you see where there's no true gospel and no true conversion there's no real transformation of heart and so the second woe and the sixth woe speak of Israel's perversion of God's true kingdom ways.

Verse 15 makes clear that where there's no real transforming faith than converts proselytes they just join a corrupt and dead institution and they become twice as much a child of hell says Jesus.

See what he's saying is when irreligious horrors become members of mere religion with no transforming power no saving power no regenerating and changing power then irreligious horrors just become religious horrors who can be doubly hellish.

[32 : 12] Isn't that true? And the matching woe there in verse 27 says well you're much more respectable on the outside maybe like a nicely whitewashed tomb that shines in the sunlight but inside it's just the same stinking corruption in fact verse 28 it's even worse because that same lawlessness is hidden by a veneer of apparent righteousness but it reeks of hypocrisy.

Well friends Jesus is saying you see that is the truth and the reality about an outwardly Christian church that says oh we cherish inclusiveness whatever that means to you don't worry you don't have to change come on stay as you are no need for extremist talk about repentance or conversion or a change of lifestyle we'll baptize you whatever you want with whatever kind of Christianity you want we'll whitewash over a child of hell and we'll call it righteousness Jesus says to church leaders who think like that and speak like that today woe to you and of course you see where there's a refusal to change your heart and your life at God's real world well you have to distort God's words don't you in order to accommodate those words to your religion and so the third woe and the fifth woe expose exactly that Israel's distortion of God's true words verses 16 to 22 just mirror what

Jesus said about oaths in the sermon on the mount where he's clear isn't he that what the law said about oaths was to give honor and love for the truth but he says here in verse 17 they're blind fools verse 9 they're blind men because they're utterly distorting God's word with their own sheer casuistry they just focus on loopholes that legitimize their own lies their own untruth aha you see I only swore by the temple and not the gold haha so it doesn't count gotcha you should never believe me as if God is blind like you are to the truth same in verses 25 and 26 they're utterly blind to the truth that the whole law was never about mere outward rituals of cleansing without the need for real inward cleansing it was always about real heart change real obedience to God and to his truth again it's so easy isn't it for organized religion to just do that and often those who are who are most taken up with the sacraments in church today are least concerned with proclaiming the message of the cross that these very sacraments speak of and so we have a mere empty sacramentalism often those most taken up with songs and so called worship to show love to God are least interested in actually listening seriously to the word of God which Jesus says is what teaches you how to really love him if you love me says Jesus you'll heed my voice and you'll obey me oh no no we don't want to hear the

Bible we just want to sing we need to be really careful don't we woe to those says Jesus who distort in that way the real words of God but all of these things you see really just reflect the very heart of the matter which you see in the central woe there in verses 23 and 24 Israel's scorn and rejection of the true heart of God himself their priorities you see are just miles from the priorities of God's true heart the myopic detail tithing herbs it has blurred into utter oblivion the real truth which is that God loves what do you see real justice righteousness and mercy and faithfulness that's real holiness and when God wants holy people he wants that he wants people with hearts like his heart yes of course little things are important

Jesus doesn't deny that in verse 23 these you ought to have done but get some perspective he says you are utterly blind verse 24 straining out a gnat so as not to become defiled and unclean by that but swallowing a camel which is the largest of all the unclean beasts it's like somebody isn't it proudly saying I always keep the sabbath but every other day they're drunk and they beat their wife and their children they're their thief they're an adulterer you see Israel led by its spiritual leadership had totally lost perspective and their calling was to be God's light to the nations it was to draw the whole world to the true light but they had turned utterly in upon themselves they lost the plot because they lost sight of God's heart for the whole world and we've got to be very careful haven't we that we don't do the same thing get taken up with all sorts of trivial things details about church life not totally unimportant but utterly piling into insignificance compared to the calling that God has given us to make disciples of all nations to share his light in this city to teach everyone to obey his commandments and to follow him

[38 : 02] Israel had every chance given to her over and over and over and this generation Jesus is speaking to was the most privileged in the whole of history they had the son of God himself in front of them to teach them to lead them but verse 31 by rejection their rejection of him you see they're bearing witness aren't they against themselves that they just fill full the sins of their fathers and therefore you see after this appalling indictment Jesus in verse 34 to the end pronounces an awful verdict he's just echoing words from the prophets of old bringing judgment upon Israel read Isaiah chapter 5 for example but then you see the prophets were announcing covenant curses from Deuteronomy 28 and 29 they were talking about the punishment of exile that was surely going to come to Israel but this this is far more solemn this is the climax isn't it of all covenant curse look at verse 33 it's far beyond mere temporary exile it's a sentence of hell therefore says

Jesus you see the case is unanswerable and judgment will be real it will be terrible and it will be permanent notice what God's judgment looks like look at verse 34 he's going to send his word of truth to them yet again prophets and wise men and scribes bearing the gospel of the cross his own message and the message of his apostles even after Christ's death and his resurrection the gospel remember what Paul says is still to the Jew first still God holds out a word that contains mercy for Israel but still says Jesus they were rejected flogging and killing and crucifying the messengers as they did read the book of Acts read church history and so verse 35 look they will bring upon themselves with only themselves to blame a judgment that is so determinedly deserved this generation notice verse 36 this generation so so privileged will be judged by their own actions it's them who will turn

God's gracious offer of mercy into his sentence of irrevocable wrath and that's the terrible truth friends you can't do that it is never what God's heart desires look at verses 37 and 38 it's so clear he would have gathered them as his children under his wings with eternal protection but they would not and that alone is what leads to verse 38 to the desolation of being rejected by God forever God desires to sentence no one to hell you do that entirely yourself by refusing his offer of infinite mercy and therefore condemning yourself to eternal darkness and friends if you find that a terrifying thing it is because that is a terrifying thing and it happened to Israel just as

Jesus said verse 38 their house that's the temple was left desolate because God departed from that temple right there and then forever when Jesus himself departed from it the first verse of chapter 24 tells us he left the temple and some years later in AD 70 the destruction of that temple by the Romans just confirmed that absolutely vividly and even if a temple were ever to be rebuilt as some people think it ought to be it would still be desolate because God is not there any longer and no one says Jesus from now on verse 39 that's a better translation then again no one from now on will encounter the living God and be welcomed into his presence unless they welcome the Messiah the son of David the son of God who bears his name the name of the Lord because he is the Lord God of Israel and of the world and just as his disciples his true disciples did welcome him with those words in the triumphal entry

Hosanna so all who would truly see the living God must bless Jesus the son of God and must seek God in his name alone whether they're Jew or Gentile male or female master or servant but as we close this morning let's be clear that this solemn chapter is preserved in our Bibles for us for us today for the church today it is an abiding warning it's not just ancient history it is real history it tells us why in the main Israel was rejected by God in that generation and for the most part subsequently throughout history because they would not and have not yet en masse welcome Christ as their king and their lord but look back to verse 1 notice whose target whose target

[44 : 01] Jesus is in this message it's those in the crowd and his disciples in other words it's those seeking him and those already following him in other words though he is speaking about those who have rejected him then his audience is his church and Matthew is writing this for the church and he's preserving it for us today because the same Christ you see confronts us today and he confronts our world of organized Christianity and as Paul says in Romans 11 we're a wild olive branch we Gentile Christians we've been grafted into the root of Israel to share the privileges of one true household of God through Jesus Christ that's what Paul says in Romans 9 to 11 and that means you see if we think that somehow we are exempt from these kinds of warnings from Jesus you need to go home and read Romans chapter 11 all over again because you see the hearts of human beings haven't changed have they in 2000 years and if we're honest most of what Jesus exposes here about the scribes and the Pharisees and their hypocrisy and their worldly hierarchies and their ugly heartlessness that has been true of so much of the

Christian church throughout its history and it's still true today so we need these warnings don't we we are responsible for our own reaction to God's word to us in this generation in our own lives in our own congregation in the wider church today and in our culture today which has likewise rejected so much of what it was founded on our western world see the scribes and the Pharisees here had departed utterly from the real heart of the real God because they rejected in their hearts the real Jesus and the real gospel they reversed God's real priorities the concerns of his heavenly kingdom just became buried by their concerns of their earthly religious empire and you can't do that in the end without bringing upon yourself the judgment of the real

Jesus and throughout history far too many churches have done that and their lampstands have been removed as Jesus warned they would be in the letters to the churches if you read about all the places that we read about in the Acts of the Apostles and the Christian churches there there is so little that remains there today and in our own land the same thing is true there are so many places aren't there that were once gospel churches that are now empty first they became emptied of the true gospel and then inevitably they became empty of people too and you can go around our city and every city in this nation and you can see the monuments to it in the churches that are now nightclubs and blocks of flats and pubs and restaurants or just rotting and derelict God did not do that to them he didn't condemn them they condemned themselves because they refused his true gospel call to real repentance and faith and they perverted his true gospel ways and they distorted his true gospel words exposing the reality that they had actually just scorned and rejected the heart of God himself and that's an abiding warning isn't it especially to a privileged people to privileged churches to privileged cultures who've received so much from

God and his gracious providence through the light of his living word let me finish by quoting once again Jesus words from Luke 12 verse 48 everyone to whom much was given of him much will be required and from him to whom they entrusted much they will demand the more an abiding warning let's pray Lord you've given us so much from your heavenly bounty of light and of life to grant us we pray to be a people who are ever humbled afresh by your all searching word and under your ever gracious hand that we we may indeed not exalt ourselves and forget you and turn from you and grieve you but rather that we may be exalted by your mighty hand to serve you faithfully and fruitfully all the days of our lives help us we pray for the sake of our

Lord Jesus Christ Amen