

# Hanging Out With Jesus: The Extremes To Which Jesus Will Go To Bring Us To Our Senses

*Matthew 23:13-39*

Good morning, men! Let's begin with a shout out today. This shout out goes to a men's group that's meeting at Park Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL. There is leader Dennis Fonville, and this is a group that meets on Wednesday evenings using the video Bible Study. Let's give these guys a big welcome to the Man in the Mirror Bible Study! One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys, glad to have you with us!

So we're in this series *Hanging Out With Jesus*. The last time we were together, we looked at becoming a servant leader, and that the purpose of servant leadership was to help others without expecting anything in return. The passage we left off with said that those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Then Jesus rolls into what are called the seven woes, however I think that it might also be appropriate to call them the seven errors that the Pharisees were making. What I want us to see this morning are just the extremes to which Jesus will go to bring us back to our senses. Just picture now what it meant to be a Pharisee. Whatever you are picturing in your mind right now is probably totally screwed up. Instead, what I want you to do is to picture yourself. Just think about your life, how hard you work to build a good life, to do the right thing, to be a good person, to lead a righteous life and make the right decisions, to try to do good in the world. Picture that side of yourself. That's what it meant to be a Pharisee.

The Pharisees were the leaders of their community. They were layman, but they were men who had really devoted themselves to leading Godly lives. But, like many men who lead Godly lives, who really are moral, they began to think of other people as being not quite as good as them. If they only knew what I knew. Those politicians! They were looking down on people who didn't have it as together. Those homeless people! I wish they could get their act together! Those poor people! If they just weren't so lazy! If they were more like me! So that's the dark side, and in this text today we're going to see the climax to this conflict that has been building for quite some time. These men had built a good life, and now they are trying to protect that good life.

Just imagine now; you have worked for a decade, two decades, maybe three decades to build your business, to build your reputation, to build your place in the community, and finally you have got some respect. Now here comes this thirty year old kid, and what does he want to do? He wants to share some new ideas about the way that you should run your operation. And guess what? People are flocking to the young guy, and you as the older middle aged guy, they're not paying as much attention to you. So how do you react? You want to protect what you've built! So you go on the attack. That's all that's happening here, there are men who have built a way of life and they're trying to protect it from somebody younger overturning it.

Jesus has to deal with those kind of men. That's what he's dealing with in this passage. Them! Except them is also us! So the title of the message today is the *The Extremes To Which Jesus Will Go To Bring Us To Our Senses*.

**The Heart Behind The Harsh Words**

First off, let's look at the heart behind the harsh words. Instead of looking at the seven woes, we're going to start at verse 37, which is at the end of the seven woes, and may or may not have immediately followed; we don't really know that this was part of that speech, but it was given chronologically soon thereafter as a minimum, and certainly refers back to the seven woes. This is Jesus. He says:

"Oh people of God, oh my people, 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, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Jesus is grieving over these religious leaders who are trying to protect this system they have built up, who are not willing to see the error of their ways, to see that he has come to fulfill the scriptures, and he's grieving deeply! He has an ache in his heart and has pity for them. This is the heart behind the harsh words that he speaks to them! The core problem here is that these men are fighting to protect the life that they built and Jesus is overwhelmed with grief because they won't listen to the truth.

The Big Idea, and it's not just these Pharisees of the past, it's the Pharisees of right now, too. It's all of us, because all of us, like them, have the tendency to put the emphasis on what's happening on the outside and leaving untended that which is happening on the inside. So the Big Idea today is this: **Right now Jesus is grieving and interceding over every person who doesn't get it.**

Let me read to you from Romans 8. Christ Jesus who died, more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God, interceding for us. I just love that! I just love the passage! Romans 8:26 & 27 a few verses before that where it says in the same way the spirit helps us in our weakness! We do not even know how we ought to pray, but the spirit intercedes for us with groans so deep that words cannot express. And then a few verses later, Jesus himself is interceding for us! The love that God has for each of us is profound, overwhelming, and so extensive that Paul goes on in Romans 8 and says for I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor demons, nor the present or future, nor any powers, height, depth, or anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. The love that Jesus has for every person is so profound that he is grieving and interceding over every single person in the world who doesn't get it! That is the heart behind the words that we're about to read!

### **What The Words Mean**

Let's take a look at what these words mean. Let's go back now to verse 13. It says:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!...

Now, I think a lot of the reason that we like these verses is because Jesus is really ticked off at these creeps, and humans like you and me, let's face it a lot of us are really ticked off at a lot of people! We're really angry at a lot of people, and we're glad to see that Jesus is angry, too! We want to go say woe to all you gays! Woe to all you pro-abortionists! Woe to you politicians! You corrupt, greedy businessmen! Man, I tell you what! But the word woe is best interpreted as both a denunciation and a grief. To say woe, it is a denunciation, but it is also a word to denote grief. There's a grief that's bound up in all of this. In that sense, there is dare I say, compassion, in these woes! So when Jesus says woe, it is denouncing the disobedience, the disconnect with the truth, and the errors that are happening. It is

denouncing the error, but it is grieving that the error is happening in the first place. Do you get that? Do you see what I'm saying? So there's a grief that comes with this.

There's a tender side to what's taking place here. It's not being angry, but it's being reluctantly upset that this even has to be brought up. Personally, I don't even like calling them the seven woes. I just like calling them the seven errors that Jesus will correct. These are words that were spoken to them, but they are written for us. So these words are written for you and me and what they mean should be considered in the context of what they mean to us, not just what it meant to them. So let's run through these seven errors and let me give you a thought or two. We could do a message on each one, but we won't. Verses 13 & 14:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor do you let those enter who are trying to..."

So I would title this salvation, this is an error about salvation. In other words, they're telling people not about grace or how to get into the kingdom, but instead are telling them about the law, all the rules and regulations that keeping them out! There are men today who are in error about how salvation is attained. By being a good boy, by obeying all these rules and regulations, if you just do this and that and the other, then you'll be okay; but we know here that salvation is a gift of grace through faith and repentance. Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone. So that's salvation.

Then, verse 15, discipleship. This is an error about discipleship.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are."

In other words, you're not walking with God and you're teaching the people that you're winning to Judaism to not walk with God either! So it's an error in discipleship and they're teaching external obedience, obey these rules, regulations and laws, and then you'll be okay with God. They're teaching external obedience as discipleship instead of inner transformation. You've heard me say a thousand times that Christianity is not behavior modification, it is heart transformation! Something that goes on in the inside!

And then verses 16-22, let's just call this oaths. This is an error about taking oaths. Jesus said let your yes be yes and your no be. The Pharisees had made up all these crazy rules about making oaths, but that's all we're going to say about that. Verses 23 and 24:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel."

Majoring in minors is what we call this. The Pharisees had books and books of rules and regulations that got into scrupulous detail on all kinds of minor things, but Jesus is saying you're missing the big picture of justice, mercy and faithfulness! Then you see in verses 25 and 26 the error of the sins of the heart.

"You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."

So the idea is not addressing the sins of the heart. The heart is desperately wicked and beyond cure! Who can understand it? To understand it is to understand that each of us has a sinful nature! You can be the greatest Christian in the world, you're like me! I'm so righteous that as a servant leader to you, I literally park my car in the parking space farthest from the front door of this building so that you will have a more convenient parking space. So praise me! Now, I actually do that, and I didn't ever think a thing about it until this morning. I was thinking about this passage and thought you know these guys should be as righteous as I am! But you know, that's exactly how it works! Just as soon as you think you've arrived, Satan just pounces on you and he works it! So, some of you guys should park over there too, like me. Verses 27 and 28:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs...

I read somewhere that once a year they went through and whitewashed the tombs of the cemeteries so that people wouldn't accidentally bump into the tombstones and thus make themselves ceremonially defiled. I don't know if that's true or not, but that's what was going on. They looked beautiful on the outside, but on the inside they were full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, you appear righteous on the outside but on the inside you're full of hypocrisy and wickedness. So this is the error of being pretentious, putting on airs and keeping up appearances.

Finally, verses 29-32, thinking more highly of yourself than you ought. They thought they were better than the prophets of old. These are what these words mean, but guess what? These are not two thousand year old errors that people simply used to make. These are the same errors people have been making since the dawn of time! They are types of errors that we still make today! How many Christian businessmen have I run across in my days of ministry have I talked to have said, well I just feel like everybody paints a target on me? I just feel like I'm a target. I'm successful, I have a lot of money. I feel like I have a target on me... You know, I would never say this to any one businessman in particular, but I finally get to say it at all, so I'm excited! I've heard that fifty times! You arrogant so and so! Think about it! How did that person get to be so successful in the first place? They put a big target on people they wanted to do business with, they had an agenda, and they went and pursued it! Now that they have theirs, they don't want you to get any of it! This even better coming out than I was thinking! Certainly a lot more fun for me, very cathartic!

The Big Idea today is this: **Right now Jesus is grieving and interceding over every person who doesn't get it.** For those guys who talk like that, for you, for me, for all of these ways in which we don't get it. These are the extremes to which Jesus is willing to go. He's willing to say to you woe! But he's not doing it in exactly the way you might think because there's this element of grief that comes with this denunciation. Everything that Jesus does is redemptive. Everything! There are no wasted angry words! There are no denunciations for the sake of denunciation! My father used to sit there on the evening news and scream and yell at the TV, denouncing this and that. He felt so frustrated because he couldn't do a thing about it! Jesus didn't feel like that, because when he made his denunciations, he knew that he could fix it!

### **What Jesus Wants From Us**

Finally, what does Jesus want from us? One of our Area Directors, Dave Armstrong from Pennsylvania, got a call one morning from his teenage daughter. On her way to school, she was driving in the fog and struck the back end of a car and called her father who rushed to the scene with his wife. Turns out there was damage to her car and to the other car, she had a little whiplash. She said Dad I just didn't see him.

There was this terrible fog and I couldn't make it go away! Dave and his wife on the way noticed there was no fog, and as they arrived on the scene, the fog apparently lifted. So they took her to the hospital to have her checked out and took the car to a garage to make sure it was safe to drive. His wife and daughter left, he got in the car, turned it on and immediately there was this fog. He also noticed the windshield wipers were still on. His daughter didn't know how to work the defroster. She had been trying to solve an inside problem with an outside solution. This is what Pharisees do. This is what we do when we act like Pharisees, we try to solve inside problems with outside solutions. So the message for us today is quite simple; if you don't know Jesus as your savior and Lord, turn to him in faith and repentance. Begin that great adventure! If you already know Jesus, continue to live in a fully surrendered relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ moment by moment. Refuse him no more. Don't try to protect what you have built! Don't ever say I just feel like I have a big target on me! Give it to God, leave it there, and know that in your struggle to do this that right now Jesus is grieving and interceding over you and every other person who doesn't get it. Let's Pray!

### **Closing Prayer**

Our dearest Father, thank you so much for your word, the truth of your word, and for giving us an opportunity to pause and think more deeply about the context of your word in our lives today. Lord, help us to remember the heart behind these harsh words, the errors that are represented by these words and how you want us to respond to these words because we understand that right now you are both grieving and interceding for us and every other person who doesn't get it. We ask this in Jesus' name, and everybody said, amen!