

“What Angers The King” Matthew 23 Sunday AM

As we consider in this series of messages what constitutes the Kingdom of God, it is required that we intentionally address and expose some of the most common beliefs and activities that serve as impostors to the Kingdom. Because it is far easier to establish than the realities of the true Kingdom, human modes of religion are the foremost elements that masquerades as the actual Kingdom of God. Jesus is not neutral about human religion. Jesus is not tolerant toward it. In this message we find that the Savior and His followers are to remain and informed about the difference between these two opposing forces. Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul diligently fought to expose and overturn any and all religious approaches to God. We must ask ourselves if we have become relaxed where they were relentless. When the Kingdom of God comes, the religious ways of humans must go.

I. Religious Authority Empty of Kingdom Sincerity (1-7)

A. Jesus noted the leaders’ inconsistency (1-3) – “Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples, 2 “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, 3 so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.”

Jesus is about to preach a five minutes sermon against the primary religious leaders of His day. He is not diplomatic as the Pharisees and scribes hear Him call them out by name. He starts with a clear-cut indictment that these religious impostors love to tell others how to live, all the while failing to fulfill the requirements that they expect of others.

B. Jesus unmasked the leaders’ intimidation (4) – “They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.”

The Pharisaical Judaism of Jesus’ lifetime had become a system of impossibly intertwined rules and regulations that had nothing to do with the heart of God. While the Law of Moses was still binding at that time, it could no longer be differentiated from the hundreds of traditions that had been added by men over the centuries. The

revelation from God in the Torah was now obscured by the ever-increasing burden of religious tradition. The Pharisees and scribes were religious scorekeepers who, according to Jesus, gave themselves consistent free passes in things that they militantly held over the heads of the common people. This is the nature of religion: rule-heavy, love-lite demands of manipulative systems and leaders.

C. Jesus exposed the leaders' intentions (5-7) – “They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, 6 and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues 7 and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.”

At the core of the matter was the motivation of being highly esteemed by other people. As long as people admired the scribes and Pharisees, they were content. The entire system of Pharisaical religion was rooted upon pride and ego. Religion looks impressive on the outside. It can pass any superficial examination because religion's emptiness is just beneath the surface. Most people do not go beneath the surface of what is seen or said, therefore they are too easily impressed with religious systems and people. Jesus always goes deeper. Jesus always burrows down to the hearts of people and beliefs. When he addresses the depth of what the Pharisees and scribes were all about, he found a deep, dark void. Nothing of Kingdom value was there. They just wanted admiration and applause.

II. Religious Words Devoid of Kingdom Substance (8-11)

A. The precision of our Kingdom allegiance (8-10) – “But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. 10 Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.” He cautions against hollow titles that exalt humans and reinforce pride

Simply put, Jesus is not into titles. He is not teaching here that the words mentioned can never be mentioned. What He cautions about here is the tendency for humans to exalt other humans. He does not allow for the option of us reinforcing one another's pride by using flattering titles. Given that the religious leaders whom Jesus is indicting loved their titles, positions and privileges, Jesus is telling the crowd to stop exalting these men. Instead, He teaches that they should exalt the Father and Himself, the Christ.

B. The paradox of our Kingdom attitudes (11-12) – “The greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” **Kingdom leadership values/priorities are opposite of the world's values**

In contrast with the bloated, egocentric Pharisees and scribes, Jesus stresses that the currency of the Kingdom is humility and servanthood. If His followers would intentionally “go low” in humility, there would be the eventual reality of God exalting those followers. If they chose to imitate the religious leaders by promoting themselves, then God would work to intentionally humble them. Kingdom attitudes stand in deep contrast to the ways of our culture. Christians must intentionally examine their hearts and regularly weed out any traces of pride, self-promotion and hunger for recognition. Jesus calls us to take upon ourselves the identity of sons and daughters who serve in humility. There is only one superstar in the Kingdom, and it is not one of us.

III. Religious Perpetuation Resulting in Kingdom Suppression (13-34)

A. The consequences of religion (13) - “...For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.”

Religion is not harmless. It serves to deceive people that they are in the Kingdom of God. Religious demands also serve to prevent others from entering the Kingdom of God. We cannot remain neutral about religion. The costs are too high.

B. The commitment of religion (15) “...you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.”

This interesting statement from the King is likely teaching that overtly religious people are doubly-difficult to bring into the Kingdom because they have mastered some religious formula which results in them remaining ignorant to their true spiritual depravity. The promotion of religious ways entraps people into thinking they are in good standing with God.

C. The blindness of religion (23-24) - “... you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!”

In the midst of his strong statements against the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus gives a hint to what exactly it is that these religious people are missing: justice, mercy and faithfulness. These three missing components are all issues of the heart. Religion seeks to master outward behavior but never looks upon the heart. Jesus goes straight for their hearts.

D. The shallowness of religion (25-28) - “...you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. 27...you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. 28 So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Again, Jesus exposes their practice of looking outwardly impressive to others while placing no priority on the inner condition of their lives. They are little more than religious mannequins who are posed in ways that make whatever they are draped in look appealing.

E. The minimizing within religion (29-33) - “...For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, 30 saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets. 31 Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. 33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?”

Jesus seems to be addressing the sentimental, shallow honoring of the true representatives of the Kingdom in past generations. The religious leaders gave lip-service to past prophets and presumably honored their holy lives. They also seemed to believe that they were of a different spirit than their forefathers who actually killed those prophets and righteous people. They are blind to the condition of their own hearts as they distinguish themselves from those who persecuted and murdered the true God-sent prophets of former years. Jesus uses intense expressions to tell the leaders standing there in the crowd that they are just like their forefathers who killed the prophets.

F. Jesus’ opposition against religion (34-36) – “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 righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.”

In an incredible display of grace, Jesus commits to continue to send prophets, wise men and scribes to these leaders so that they might find the willingness to repent. Jesus prophesies that the ones He will send in the future will meet with the same fate that former prophets did. He tells the leaders that they will, in their blind religious zeal, kill the very ones that Jesus sends to them. His words would certainly come to pass as He himself would be crucified at the call of these very same men He was rebuking in this message.

In this fiery hot chapter from Matthew's gospel, the King releases an undiluted torrent of fiery rebuke upon the religious leaders. Jesus pulls no punches as He scathes the scribes and Pharisees in front of a crowd. In this short set of consecutive indictments, Jesus denounces the scribes & Pharisees with seven pronouncements of woe upon them. His repeated use of the word "woe" is meant to send a very clear pronouncement of condemnation upon their religious advance. He is speaking strict judgment upon them with a divine, unveiled threat of eternal judgment. Jesus calls them hypocrites 6 times, blind 5 times, fools, serpents and a brood of vipers. With a heavy final blow, He resigns them and their beliefs to being Hell-bound in verse 33. While the temptation for modern believers is to leave moralized religion unaddressed, Jesus did not. The Pharisees and scribes were the conservative, bible-believing fundamentalists of their day. Everyone was impressed with their religious performance. Everybody, that is, except for Jesus. He told them that they were impostors with nothing going on within their hearts. He declared they were outside of the Kingdom and, through their advancing of their overtly traditional religion, they were preventing sincere people from finding the Kingdom of God (vs. 13). If we are going to be faithful to live as Kingdom citizens and to advance the true Kingdom of God, then we must deal strongly with all religious masquerading. We begin in our own hearts to see if we have a little Pharisee running around in there. Once we crucify our inner-Pharisee, we then commit to humbly but relentlessly expose religion in each and every place that it serves as a counterfeit to the Kingdom. This is the essence of Reformation. This is the heart of Jesus. This is part of living in the Kingdom of God.

5:00PM Notes Below

“What the Kingdom is NOT” Multiple passages Sunday PM 11/4/18

The enemy likes to traffic in substitutes. Satan and his demon army love to offer substitutes. Every substitute they offer is Hell’s counterfeit of Heaven’s currency. God is advancing the reality of an everlasting Kingdom over which His Son, Jesus, is the King. In order to resist this reality, Satan seeks to deceive the masses into settling for things which look similar to the Kingdom of God on a superficial glance but, upon deeper inspection, are nothing but damnable substitutes. This message takes an unapologetic look at four of the enemy’s most common substitutes for the Kingdom: rules, rhetoric, religion and retreat. Over the last 2,000 years, many have mistakenly settled for these things only to find out far too late that they never entered the Kingdom of God.

I. The Kingdom Is Not Founded Upon Rules (Romans 14:17-19)

“For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.”

Paul’s letter to the believers in Rome contains some of the most helpful counsel in all of God’s Word concerning what we typically refer to as “Christian liberty”. In chapters 14 & 15, Paul highlights that there are many matters of preference about which faithful Christians will disagree. These debatable issues are not to divide us. We are called of God to operate in high consideration for one another and not to exercise our personal freedom in ways that might cause others to struggle. When he writes above about “eating and drinking”, Paul is referring to the practice of eating meat that was sold publicly in the meat markets after being potentially sacrificed to pagan idols by the owner of the shop who prepared the meat. Paul submits that meat is meat and that there is no such thing as spiritually defiled meat, therefore the Christians are allowed to eat it with no worries about it being sin. He also mentions the age-old debate on whether or not Jesus-followers can drink alcohol. In the end, Paul counsels people who believe differently on these subjects to remember that the Kingdom of God is not about meat or drink. God’s Kingdom is not founded upon rules and regulations of permissible or prohibited behaviors. Paul calls on believers to weigh in more heavily on seeking to discern if they live in righteousness, peace and joy.

These are the things that reveal the kingdom, not long lists of personal preferences. The Kingdom of God is an internal reality with an external manifestation. Whereas it is important to live in clearly stated biblical boundaries, we cannot legislate the Kingdom of God. It must proceed from within the lives of Christians in expressed righteousness, peace and joy empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is the kingdom according to Paul, not rules.

II. The Kingdom Is Not Validated Through Rhetoric (1 Cor. 2:4-5, 4:20)

1 Cor. 4:20 - “For the Kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.”

1 Cor. 2:4-5 - “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Doesn't there seem to be far more religious talk than Kingdom action? Do you ever find yourself concerned that we have far more words about God's Kingdom than we do actual evidence of God's presence and power? Things were no different for the Apostle Paul as he traveled on his apostolic journeys to establish churches throughout the Roman Empire. When Paul established churches, he came with both words of revelation about the Kingdom and power to back up those words. Signs, wonders, miracles and healings proceeded from Paul's ministry. In Corinth, people arose who spoke out against Paul when he was away from them on other Kingdom journeys. They sought to undermine his authority in the church. They grappled for power in his absence. When Paul got wind of this type of un-kingdom behavior, he sent word to let them know that he would gladly confront those who were resisting him. He acknowledged in his letter to the Corinthians that he was not as impressive of a speaker as some of his opponents were. He wasn't worried about not being able to outmatch their words. He would be coming with supernatural power and their words against him would prove to be pitiful. From the two verses above, we learn that our sermons, our doctrines, our creeds and our church clichés are not evidence that the Kingdom of God is manifesting from us. Paul teaches that, where the Kingdom is, power will be found. Though spoken and written words of truth help us understand the Kingdom, it is clear in Scripture that supernatural, Holy Spirit power is the proof that must be present. We live in a world full of empty pledges, promises and polemics. For Kingdom people, there must be verifying power behind all that we say. Apart from the power of God, talk about the Kingdom is little more than empty rhetoric.

III. The Kingdom Is Not A Friend to Religion (Matthew 23:13-15, 15:7-14)

Matthew 23:13-15 - “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in...For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.”

Matthew 15:7-14 - “For the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. 7 You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 8 “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; 9 in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. 10 And he called the people to Him and said to them, “Hear and understand: 11 it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.” 12 Then the disciples came and said to Him, Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” 13 He answered, “Every plant that My heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. 14 Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

Many Christians are unaware that Jesus reserved His harshest words for the religious crowds. Holding nothing back, the King unleashed multiple messages of confrontation and indictment against the Pharisees and scribes who controlled the people through their legalistic, rigid religion. In the two bible passages above, we have just a small sample of how Jesus felt about the practice of religious manipulation and the advancing of dead, religious systems. He goes so far as to declare that religion and religious leaders have not entered into the reality of the Kingdom. Make no mistake about it: Jesus pronounced spiritual doom on those who served religion while ignoring the true Kingdom of God. Even worse, Jesus declares that their commitment to protect their religious ways actually served to obstruct others from entering into the Kingdom of God. When the disciples informed Jesus that his words offended the religious leaders, Jesus showed zero concern for His offending of them. In Matthew chapter 23 alone, Jesus refers to leaders with the following:

- Jesus denounces the scribes & Pharisees with seven separate WOES.
- He calls them HYPOCRITES six times
- He calls them BLIND five times (blind guides, blind fools, blind men, blind Pharisees)
- He calls them SERPENTS/BROOD OF VIPERS
- He also declares that they are Hell-bound and living in the spirit of murder

IV. The Kingdom Is Not A Place of Retreat (Acts 14:19-22)

“But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God.”

In the end, all Christians need to recognize that our life and work in the Kingdom of God will necessarily be characterized by exertion and sacrifice. There is no authentic way to live casually in the Kingdom or about the Kingdom. The whole of the Christian life is one of pressing forward in faith against the three-fold opposition of the world-system, one's own flesh and then the devil. Christianity is not a retreat center religion. Christianity is not a vacationing escape from reality. Christianity is not a campground - it truly is a battleground. Paul was stoned to death at Lystra and left for dead because of His commitment to King Jesus. The religious followers of Pharisaical Judaism stoned him as a heretic. God supernaturally raised Paul from death and Paul immediately continued serving God. Part of his message was, “Through MANY TRIBULATIONS, we must enter the Kingdom of God.” Kingdom living is not supposed to be easy. We follow a King who laid down everything. His disciples laid down everything. The early Christians frequently gave their lives for the King. Nothing has changed but our generation seems to be seeking what more the King can do for us. We no longer embrace Paul's declaration that Kingdom living involves much tribulation. We need to get reacquainted with this component of the Kingdom. It is truly all-or-nothing. We press forward as followers of King Jesus. We never retire. We never resign. We are never released. We never regret committing to the Kingdom. We never retreat.