**Matthew Sermon XV**

**Weightier Matters**

**Review:**

Matthew 22:1-14 The parable of the wedding banquet.

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a banquet.

Q: Have you been making excuses for not taking part in the things of the kingdom?

Are you the person who is at the banquet and is not wearing the proper clothing?

Gal 3:26-27 It is people who have not been clothed with Christ! It is people who have not been baptized into Christ.

Jesus vs. the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Jesus shows great—dare I say—miraculous wisdom in answering their questions.

This morning: Weightier Matters

I. Matthew 23:1-39 Seven Woes on the Pharisees.

Matthew 23:1-12 Jesus is speaking to “the crowds and to his disciples (ie. to us).

Matthew 23:13-39 Jesus is speaking to the Teachers of the Law and Pharisees.

Matthew 23:1-12

As we read this, remember, he is speaking to his apostles and his disciples, not to the Pharisees.

v. 3 Note: He is not suggesting a rebellious spirit. Obey the Pharisees, but…

Two problems here:

1. v. 4 These religious people tie “heavy burdens” (as opposed to Jesus whose burden is easy and light Matthew 11:28-30).

2. They are not willing to lift a finger to help their followers carry these burdens.

What are these burdens? They are religious duties which are

1. not specifically biblical and

2. are not tied to loving God. (We will see specific examples in 23:13-39 when he is speaking to the Pharisees)

Because, like we saw last week, Gal 5:6 “The only thing that matters is faith, expressing itself through love.”

So, if I am not into it, if it is not out of love, then I should not obey?

No! Do it anyway, but please move to the place where it comes from love.

As opposed to Colossians 2:20-23 They lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. That is why they are heavy burdens. Note v. 23 the Pharisaic “appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body…”

1. Heavy burdens.
2. Not lifting a finger to help.

v. 5 They are asking you to do this, not because they care about you and love you, but so that they can look good, religiously, in front of people. v. 5 “Everything they do is done for people to see.” It is about being religious, not about loving God.

Honestly, this message is more for Jan and me than the rest of you, but anyone with any leadership role, even in a discipling relationship: Listen up!

v. 5 Phylacteries wide (boxes on heads and straps on arms) (see picture)

v. 8-9 Do not call anyone “Teacher” or “Father.” Equivalent today: “Most Reverend” or “Pope” (which, by the way, means Father)

Funny example: Jeff Hungerford and I formed a threesome with a Catholic priest and Jeff pulled out Matthew 23:9.

(btw, calling your father “father” or even someone your spiritual “father in the faith” is OK!) The problem is exalting humans in a way which might rival our honoring of Jesus.

BTW: Do me a favor and do not call me Pastor, even to others. I am NOT a pastor.

I am a minister, but then again, every disciple of Jesus is a minister.

Jesus sums up his response to us concerning the Pharisees with this:

v. 11-12 The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

How many times has Jesus said this in Matthew?????

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Matthew 5:5

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5:44

Whoever takes the lowly position of a child is the greatest in the kingdom. Matthew 18:4

Leave the 99 and go for the one who strays. Matthew 18:12

Matthew 20:25-28 Whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

It is not about status, but service.

Matthew 23:13-26 for now Now Jesus is talking directly to the Pharisees with seven “woes”. “You”

Side note: In the NT the Pharisees are not necessarily the bad guys. After the Abomination of Desolation (next week) they were the Hasidim—the righteous ones who restored Judaism to its original purity. Even in Jesus’ day, they were the ones who took the Hebrew Bible seriously. They were the ones who preached the holiness and the sovereignty of God. And, as we will see, many of them became Christians.

The term pharisaism applies to the majority who did what we will see below.

What is the worst possible charge that can be laid on any disciple, but especially on any leader of disciples?

v. 13 “You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces.”

Q: How do they do this? By making worship of God a matter of rules and regulations. By majoring in the minors. By not seeing the kingdom.

It is like Matthew 6:23 “If your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness.” If you do not get what the kingdom of God is about, then you get nothing. It is about being the least of all. It is about being merciful, about being a peacemaker, about loving your enemies, about loving God. If you miss this, no amount of religion will move you one step closer to God. This is what the kingdom of God is about. It is about real love.

It is seeing Christianity as a religion, not as a kingdom.

A weird fact: There is no Matthew 23:14. The manuscripts used in the Middle Ages, when the verses were chosen they had an interpolation from Mark 12:40, but none of the oldest manuscripts of Matthew included this verse!

v. 15 Wow!

Ex: v. 16 “If anyone swears by the temple it means nothing, but if you swear by the gold in the temple you are bound by that oath.”

Matthew 5:33-37 Jesus has already said for Christians, do not even make oaths at all. But… for the Pharisees, making rules about such things is their “thing.”

How about just loving people and, therefore, doing what you said you would do (rather than making an oath)!!!

v. 23 you make sure that people give 10% on Sunday and that they have a quiet time every day, but you do not care about the people. What about mercy, what about loving the person?

You make sure that the sisters do not wear inappropriate clothing. You pull out a ruler, but you don’t notice that you said it in an unloving way.

You make sure that the brother does not spend time alone with the sister, but you don’t notice that he is really hurting inside and is feeling lonely.

A profane word slips out of a young disciple and you jump down their throat, but you fail to ask where that came from. “You must have really been hurt.”

v. 23-24 Weighing out a tenth of your spices. (note: Jesus is not condemning weighing out the tenth…) Are you straining out a gnat (impure) but swallowing a camel (the largest animal in the Middle East, also impure)?

They neglect the “more important matters.” “weightier matters”

Q: Do you major in the minors of Christianity?

This is the key verse today. Q: What are these “weightier matters?”

Jesus: What really matters? v. 24 What is the “camel?” (as opposed to the gnat)

The “camel” is justice, mercy and faithfulness. It is to act justly toward your fellow human being. It is showing mercy to people, even as you help them to do right and not to do wrong. It is to live in a faithful hesed relationship with God.

Are you treating the downtrodden and those in disadvantaged situations justly?

Are you showing mercy, even as you call people to do what is right?

Are you being faithful to God? Do you have a pure heart?

Without the inward righteousness, the outward observance is meaningless, so why focus on that?

This reminds us of Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

Jesus is not saying it is unimportant to “clean the outside of the cup” (v. 25) or to “whitewash the tombs” (to prevent touching them, and therefore becoming ritually unclean, v. 27) or to get to church on time, or to stop using profane words in your conversation, or to wear modest clothes…

It is a little like when Jesus said to take the plank out of your eye before you take the dust speck out of your sister’s eye. He did not say to not remove the dust speck…

Q: What is more important to you: enforcing the rule or loving the person? It needs to come from love and concern, not from rules, even if the rules are good.

Whitewashed tombs. They whitewashed tombs, not so they would look beautiful, but so that people would not accidentally touch them, and therefore become ceremonially unclean.

You look good. You clean up well for church, but your heart has grown cold toward God. You harbor deep-seated sin in your heart.

It stopped being about love a while ago…

Is that you?

v. 29-36 Woe to you Pharisees.

Woe to you religious persons who no longer care about the weightier matter of Justice, mercy and faithfulness—who are Christians of the head, but not the heart. Who are still here, but more concerned about rules and regulations than about loving God and his people.

v. 32 Wow! He says, “Go ahead kill me. You might as well…”

v. You religious people are snakes and vipers.

Jesus, tell me how you feel about such people!

Q: What makes you angry? What made Paul angry? (legalism, law vs faith)

What made Jesus angry? Religiosity without heart—faithfulness to God and mercy to our fellow humans.

v. 35 “From the blood of Abel (Genesis 4:4) to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berekiah (2 Chron 24:22 the last book of the Jewish Bible)

v. 36 A prophecy which came true in AD 70 (see Matthew 25)

But… notice v. 37

Is Jesus upset? Is Jesus angry?

Sure, but notice. Matthew 23:37-39 Jesus REALLY LOVES these Pharisees and teachers of the Law.

If only… Jesus desperately wants to show mercy, not justice to them.

v. 37 but they were not willing.

Q: Are you willing to let Jesus gather you in like a hen does her chicks?

And notice this: Paul, a Pharisee became a Christian. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, he became a Christian. Acts 15:5 A number of the Pharisees believed.

Jesus desperately wants them to come to their senses. Sure, he is upset, but he feels for them. He loves them. He cares deeply about them. He longs to “gather them together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

v. 39 Another prophecy. This is my last visit to you until I come again at the end of time (see Ch 25)

The questions for us:

1. What really matters to you? Is it faithfulness (hesed) to God and mercy toward people, or is it doctrine and religious rules?

2. Are you willing? Are you willing to be gathered under the wings of Jesus? Are you willing to accept the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faithfulness to God?