

The Pharisee in Me

April 9 – Matthew 22:41-23:36; Mark 12:35-40; Luke 20:41-47

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Day 99 – 266 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

After being bombarded by the religious leaders with trick questions, Jesus went on the offense. First, He asked them a difficult question, then exposed them for their hypocrisy, and finally pronounced judgment on them.

Regarding the question, Jesus asked, "Whose son is the Messiah?" (*Matt. 22:41-46*). He knew that the religious leaders would not admit that the Messiah was the Son of God because that would insinuate that Jesus was the Son of God. They answered that He is the son of David. Jesus replied, "Then why did David refer to Him as Lord?" They could not answer Him.

Jesus then followed by exposing the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. **"All that these men tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them"** (23:3). Ouch! Why did Jesus make such painful remarks? These men were legalists, making sure everyone else followed the letter of the law while they ignored the spirit of the law (v.4). Rather than serve the people, they sought the attention and adoration of the people, none of which they deserved (v.5-10). Jesus said, "The greatest among you shall be your servant" (v.11, 12).

Next, Jesus leveled charges against these men, as if standing in a court of law. First, they kept people from the gospel, from entering the kingdom of heaven (v.13). Second, they took advantage of widows by getting them to forfeit their property for God's service (v.14). Third, they trained their disciples to be more ruthless and conniving than they were (v.15). Fourth, they devised a system of vows that enabled them to avoid obligations (v.16-22).

Fifth, these leaders were experts at ritualism, but they failed to administer justice and mercy (v.23, 24). Sixth and seventh, they looked good on the outside, but on the inside, they were rotten (v.25-28). They lacked integrity or

character. Finally, these men outwardly honored the fallen prophets of old (for the sake of the people) but inwardly they despised them (v.29-33). Therefore, they were just as guilty as those who persecuted and killed God's messengers.

After leveling charges against these corrupt leaders, Jesus condemned them to hell (v.33). He laid at their feet the blood of the righteous people of God who had been slain (v.34-36). That generation would be held responsible, and they would pay the price. Part of that judgment was fulfilled in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD.

Daily Reflection

Does this conversation conflict at all with your impression of Jesus as the gentle Savior? Why or why not? Why would Jesus hurl His greatest condemnation at religious leaders?

While it is easy to point fingers at the Pharisees, we must look in the mirror to see if there is any hypocrisy in us. **Truth be told, because of our flesh, there is a little Pharisee in us all.** Have you ever heard someone say, "Do as I say, not as I do?" Does your walk match your talk? What Pharisaic tendencies do you exhibit? What would the Lord say about you?

The Message in the Mite

April 10 – Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4

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Day 100 – 265 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus commented on the offering of a poor widow. While this passage is short and simple, it is no less important. Sometimes the most profound truths are hidden in the plainest tales. What lessons can we learn from this scene?

First, **the incident followed Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees' hypocrisy.** Luke understood the connection by relating it to what Jesus said, "Beware of the scribes who devour widows' houses... for they will receive greater condemnation" (20:47). To prove His point, He provided an example to His disciples. The widow's gift couldn't have been timelier.

Second, **the Lord sees and knows what we give to Him.** In those days, the treasury or offering receptacles were visible to everyone, and often there was a line of people waiting to contribute. Thus, giving to God was a public act, which the rich turned into a chance to flaunt their wealth. They weren't really motivated by their love for the Lord but by their desire to impress others. But Jesus saw them all, and though we may not give like that today, He still sees and knows what we contribute to His work.

Second, the gift that caught Jesus' attention, and the one that He pointed out to His disciples, was not one of the wealthy benefactors but the offering of the widow. In other words, **what catches the attention of men does not catch the attention of God, and what catches the attention of God does not catch the attention of men.** To others, the widow's gift was insignificant. To Jesus, it was meaningful.

Third, **it is not the size of the offering that matters to God but the sacrifice of the gift and the sincerity in which it is given.** In other words, it is not about the means but the motive. Some translations refer to the widow's offering as a mite. Mark said her gift amounted to a cent. In other words, she gave two halfpennies. When we see a penny on the ground, we leave it there

because it is worthless today. But, in the Lord's eyes, these two halfpennies were not worthless. Others gave out of their surplus (extra, left over), but she gave all she owned. Imagine having no other means of support and yet giving it to the Lord for His work. That is sacrificial giving.

Daily Reflection

The widow's example is convicting. It causes us to think about what and how we are giving.

Are you currently giving to the work of God? While there are many worthy ministries to support, one that you cannot overlook is the local church. Financially supporting the institution God established to carry on His work on earth should be a priority in your life. Is it?

Is what you give back to the Lord sacrificial or surplus? How can you tell?

Have you ever thought that your giving is insignificant in the big picture, that it will not do much to help? What encouragement can you take from this story?

Be on the Alert

April 11 – Matthew 23:37-24:51; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36

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Day 101 – 264 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus shared with His disciples the things which are to come before the end of the age. We refer to them today as “the end times.” The setting is the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley, which afforded the best view of Jerusalem. Thus, Jesus’ address is often called “the Olivet Discourse,” which is some of the most insightful descriptions of the future in all of Scripture.

Jesus’ discourse was triggered by the disciples’ wonder at the beautiful Temple. When He prophesied its destruction (which was partially fulfilled in 70 AD by the Romans), the disciples wanted to know more about the signs of His coming and the end of the age (*Mk. 13:1-4*). At that point Jesus shared several events that must occur before His return.

First, many false prophets and imposters will claim to be the Messiah (*v.6, 21, 22*). Second, there will be wars and rumors of wars (*v.7, 8*). Next, there will be earthquakes and famines (*v.8*). There will also be a great persecution of believers (*v.9-13*). Finally, Jesus said, the gospel will be preached to all nations (*v.10*).

All these things have happened since Jesus left, but He said that they “are the beginning of birth pangs” (*Matt. 24:8*), meaning like a mother having a baby, they will increase in intensity until the Son appears. But the one sign that signifies the beginning of the end is when “the abomination of desolation stands in a place where it should not be” (*Mk. 13:14*). The *abomination of desolation* is a reference to the image of the Anti-Christ, and the place where it should not be is the Temple. Therefore, Jesus was indicating that the Temple will be rebuilt and the Anti-Christ will then desecrate it with worship of his image (*Dan. 9:27; 11:31*).

Jesus also described those days as “a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning, and never will” (*v.19*). After the tribulation, Jesus will return (*v.26*).

Daily Reflection

While there are various interpretations of the end times and even disagreements about how they will play out (especially regarding the rapture), two things are certain — these things will take place, and Jesus will return. When they do happen, we are to remember that Jesus warned us in advance, which will give us even more confidence in the authority of His Word.

Three times, in His closing statement, Jesus used the words, “**Be on the alert.**”

“Take heed, *keep on the alert*, for you do not know when the appointed time will come” (*v.33*).

“Therefore, *be on the alert*, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or in the morning...” (*v.35*).

“What I say to you I say to all, *be on the alert*” (*v.37*).

Why do you think Jesus said this three times?

To be alert means to be watchful, vigilant, or guarding against surprise. What is the opposite of alertness? What are some ways to remain alert for Jesus’ return?

Are You Prepared?

April 12 – Matthew 25:1-30

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Day 102 – 263 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus told the parables of the bridesmaids and of the talents. These illustrations followed His lengthy explanation of the end times and the warning to be ready for His return (24:42, 44).

First, let's consider the parable of the bridesmaids or virgins. While there is a lot of debate regarding which return this story is about (the rapture or the Second Coming or both), one thing is clear, Christ is the Groom, and the bridesmaids are those anticipating His arrival. **Five were prepared, and five were not.** While the five unprepared bridesmaids appeared to be part of the wedding party, they were not. When they missed the Groom's arrival and later tried to enter the wedding, the Groom told them, "I do not know you" (v.12).

The point is clear. Jesus will return, and when He does, it will be too late to make up our mind about who He is and whether to believe and follow Him. **"Today is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). When Jesus returns, the door will be closed.** Those left standing out in the dark will have missed their opportunity to be saved.

Second, the parable of the talents should really be called the parable of the servants. It is like the parable of the bridesmaids, in that the servants are waiting for the Master to return. However, it answers a key question. What are we (His followers) supposed to be doing while we wait for Jesus to return?

Christ's followers are to be about the work of the Master — investing their talents and making disciples (Matt. 28:19, 20). Those who claim to be servants of Christ but who are not busy about His business are pretenders, not true followers. Their charade will be exposed upon His return when each person will give an account of their lives. His true followers will hear, "Well done, My good and faithful servant" (v.21). Pretenders will hear, "Throw them into the outer darkness..." (v.30).

Daily Reflection

When we consider these two parables side by side, the message comes into focus. **To be alert or ready for the Lord to return means that we must be one of His true and faithful servants.** To become one of His servants is to be born again, to surrender our lives to Christ, placing our faith in Him for the forgiveness of sin. To be a faithful servant means to be busy about His work, bearing fruit until He returns.

What about you? Are you prepared for Jesus' return? Have you placed your faith in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins? Have you been "born again"? What is your faith story?

Are you busy about the work of Christ while you wait for His return? Are you investing your talents? Are you bearing fruit of good works? Or have you wasted your time? What will you hear from Him when He arrives?

The Least of These

April 13 – Matthew 25:31-46

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Day 103 – 262 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus described the judgment of “all the nations” after His glorious return (v.32). The context is after the tribulation and before His reign in the new earthly kingdom (24:29-31). Evidently, these are the people who survive the end times and who are alive to see the Lord’s second coming.

At this judgment, the Lord will separate the people of the nations like sheep and goats, the sheep to His right and the goats to His left. The sheep are believers (those saved during the tribulation, depending on your view of the rapture). The goats are the unsaved who rejected Christ. To the sheep the Lord gave their inheritance in His kingdom, but to the goats He judged to eternal damnation.

There is a third group in the story, whom Jesus called “these brothers of Mine” (v.40, 45). Though the identity of this group is unclear, it is obvious that they are His followers, disciples, or messengers, and He cared deeply how they are treated. In fact, much of the passage we read addressed the treatment of “His brothers, even to the least of them.” He even connects the care or contempt they receive to Himself (v.40).

At first glance, it might appear that salvation and eternal life are works based, dependent on how well people treat “His brothers.” But that assumption does not align with the rest of Scripture. Salvation is not earned by our works. Rather the treatment of Christ’s “brothers” is evidence of those who have received or rejected Him. Besides, notice that Jesus said, “Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (v.34), meaning that the Lord knew His followers since the beginning.

It is important to point out that hell is just as real as heaven (v.41, 46). Jesus Himself said everyone will live for eternity. Some will receive eternal rewards, while others will receive eternal punishment. There are no other options.

Daily Reflection

Although this passage is about the judgment or separation of the nations, **we cannot overlook that so many verses address the treatment of “the least of these.”** The Lord cares about the hungry, the thirsty, the poor, the sick, the stranger, and the prisoner. When we serve them, He says, in a sense we are serving Him.

Why does society tend to overlook “the least of these”? Would you say that “the least of these” are regularly on your mind? Why or why not?

Unbelievers can also care for “the least of these,” but their care will be different than ours. How so?

Good works are not a cause of salvation but rather an effect. Loving others is evidence of God’s spirit of love in us; and **His love is attentive to all people, even “the least of these.”** Will you serve most those who are least?

The Judas in Me

April 14 – Lk. 21:37-22:6; Matt. 26:1-5, 14-16; Mk. 14:1, 2, 10, 11

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Day 104 – 261 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Judas made a deal with the religious leaders to betray Jesus. Of course, Jesus knew this would happen and even predicted it several times (*Matt. 26:2*). Still, it is hard to imagine that one of the disciples would deliver Jesus to His enemies.

Jesus had come to Jerusalem for this reason. It was time for Him to “give His life as a ransom for many” (*Mk. 10:45*). But, for the last few days of His ministry, He taught in the Temple (*Lk. 21:37, 38*). At night, He and His disciples crossed the valley and camped on the Mount of Olives, near the location where He would be betrayed (Garden of Gethsemane).

As for the time of the year, it was Passover. Jerusalem was packed with travelers who had come to the Temple to remember the night their ancestors were freed from Egyptian bondage. They would also celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. With so many people in town, and with Jesus’ popularity, the Jewish leaders didn’t want to arrest Him during the day. Rather they chose a stealthier approach and opted to seize Him at night.

That’s where Judas was helpful. He knew where Jesus would be and when He would be there. Thus, Judas made a deal with the chief priests to find the right moment to deliver Him up to them. That is the very meaning of the word *betray*, to deliver into the hands of an enemy by treachery, in violation of trust.

But why would Judas do it? What was his motive? Had something happened that caused conflict between Jesus and him? Had Judas become disenchanted or disappointed with Jesus’ ministry and purpose? The truth is that we don’t know for sure. However, the Bible gives us clues that Judas was rotten from the beginning (*John 6:64, 70, 71; 13:10, 11*). He knew that Judas did not believe that He was the Messiah or that He could grant him salvation.

Daily Reflection

Judas was a sinner like the rest of us. He had a hard and darkened heart. There are indications that Judas worshiped money. He was the treasurer for the disciples, but he was also a thief who took money from the ministry. Remember, Judas was the disciple who got angry at Mary when she “wasted” the expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus.

So then, it should not surprise us that Judas was a sellout. Though He was one of Jesus’ disciples, He was not a true follower. He had eyes but did not see. He had ears but did not hear. Instead, he was looking for his next score, to advance himself at the expense of others. The religious leaders gave him that opportunity when they paid him thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus. Judas took it (*Matt. 26:14*).

Because Judas never dealt with his sin and shortcomings, because he never truly surrendered his life to Christ, and because he said yes to temptation more often than he said no, he gave Satan the opportunity to use him for evil purposes. In other words, **his little failures led to his big failure. His unaddressed deficiencies led to his catastrophic downfall.**

The same is true for us. While Satan cannot indwell Christians (because of the Holy Spirit), we are still susceptible to his influence. Though we have been given weapons of warfare to defeat the enemy, that does not mean that we use them. **Our little failures can eventually amount to big ones.** Our unaddressed sins and shortcomings can lead us to a catastrophic downfall. If we choose to say yes to temptation more than we say no, **we will give the devil a foothold in our lives, to use us for his purposes** (*Eph. 4:25-29*). What Judas did was unthinkable but, truth be told, **there is a Judas in all of us.** Remember, the other disciples betrayed Jesus as well. Watch your steps closely, to ensure that they don’t lead you away from the Lord and into the devil’s den.

Take Up the Towel

Today in Your Reading

Jesus and His disciples ate their last meal together in an upper room in Jerusalem. It was Passover and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The crucifixion was just one day away, so Jesus spent His last evening with the disciples and shared some of His most memorable words (*Jn. 13-17*).

Typically, before a meal, the Jews washed their hands. If there was a hired servant, he would be called upon to wash their feet as well. But remember, Jesus and His disciples did not wash their hands (*Mk. 7:1-5*), and there was no servant present that night in the upper room, until Jesus got up, girded Himself with a towel, and began washing the disciples' feet.

Jesus knew that He was about to return to His Father in heaven. He also knew that all things (authority) had been given into His hands. Still, **He took the towel and demonstrated selfless, humble service to His disciples.** "I, the Teacher, have washed your feet, so you also ought to wash one another's feet" (*Jn. 13:14*).

The gesture surprised the men. Peter even questioned Jesus about it. But He explained that the washing was a symbol of their salvation. "He who has bathed need only to wash his feet, but he is completely clean" (*v.10*). Someone who bathes (for example in a river or public bath) is clean, but on the way home their feet get dirty again. Thus, they use the basin of water to wash their feet again. Our salvation is permanent and thorough. Because of Christ, we are completely clean, justified in the eyes of God, spiritually without sin. However, in our flesh, we continually deal with sin and ask forgiveness as a part of the sanctification process (symbolized in the foot washing).

Jesus assured the disciples, "You are clean, but not all of you" (*v.11*). Of course, He was referring to Judas, who would betray Him. Jesus continued, "I do not speak of all of you, for I

know the ones I have chosen..." (*v.18*). Later, at the table, Jesus announced that one of the disciples would betray Him. They had no idea that Judas was a traitor. But he was finally exposed and left to fulfill his evil plan. Notice that it was night when Judas left, a subtle hint that this was a dark moment in the story.

Daily Reflection

How hard it must have been for Jesus to wash the feet of His betrayer. Knowing the deal that he had made with the chief priests and that the time of his betrayal was near, **He still chose to take up the towel.** How fitting it is that John wrote, "Jesus, having loved His own who are in the world, loved them to the end" (*v.1*).

Washing feet is easier said than done. What exactly does it require of you?

Are you a foot washer? Which of the above requirements is difficult for you? Why is that?

It's one thing to take up the towel and wash the feet of those you love or even like, but to wash the feet of Judas? Really? Do you have any Judases in your life, people who have hurt you, angered you, betrayed you, caused you pain? Would you wash their feet? Read *Luke 6:27-36*. Love your enemies. Do good to those you persecute you. **Follow Christ's example. Gird yourself, take up the towel, and wash.**