

Matthew 22:41-23:12

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to Matthew chapter 22. Matthew chapter 22, you've got a church Bible, it's on page 828.

! And it's the last paragraph of Matthew 22 and the first paragraph of Matthew 23.! It's one of those instances where the break in paragraphs and chapter headings is not very helpful.

So if you've been here for the last few weeks you'll know that we're in a pretty sticky section of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus is in the hot seat and he is answering the rapid fire hostile questions from the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

It's a week before he dies, they've been hounding him with questions in order to trick him up and to make him fall. So they can pounce on him once and for all and every answer of Jesus is utterly brilliant.

Which is very encouraging I think. Not just because he is so different from us but because we don't have the answers but he does.

[1 : 11] And if you've got the answers, you can go back to the start of Matthew 21 and you'll know quite surprisingly that Jesus asks twice the number of questions that they ask of him.

And each time he reverses what they ask of him. And so the question as we read Matthew 21, 22, 23 is what is wrong with them? What is wrong with these guys?

And they are sincere men. And they're sincere men who spent their whole lives studying the Bible and they hate Jesus. And they refuse him. And they're bound to kill him. And they'll succeed in that, won't they?

What is wrong with them? And the answer that Jesus gives us is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy. I don't have seen any thunder from next week's passage. There's plenty of lightning and thunder in our own passage.

But next week we get to this last speech from Jesus to these people who've made themselves enemies. And seven times he says to them, woe to you. I just look at the first verse after our passage.

[2 : 17] John 23, verse 13. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces.

For you neither enter yourselves, nor do you allow those who would enter to go in. And for good measure. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you travel across a sea and land to make a single cross, a single convert.

But when he becomes a follower, when he becomes a crossite, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourself. He's not messing around, is he, Jesus? But even as he says this, I want you to note the tone of the passage.

Jesus' tone here is one of compassion. He is saying, woe to you. He is not gloating. He is not happy. He tells them this as a last measure to bring them to repentance.

This is the thing he's saying that's got a grip on your heart. It is hypocrisy. Wake up and see it. And you are about to reach the point of no return. And so this morning I want to tell you as a well-seasoned and a well-practiced hypocrite, I have found this passage terrifying.

[3 : 36] Terrifying preparation. It's like being in a massive lightning storm and lifting up the biggest umbrella you can find. Or it's like grating cheese with a tiny nav of cheese.

And you know as you do it that your finger's about to get cut. Or it's like trying to move a tiger from one room to the other in a house that doesn't have any doors inside. You get the picture?

It's a really great temptation for Bible preachers. And to be very nice, to be very pious in front of you all. But to not let God change my heart. And the danger of preaching is that the approval that comes in preaching, you begin to live as though appearances are more important than reality.

And hypocrisy is so, so dangerous because it's a form of self-deception. So you know, don't you, that it's possible to go through the motions of worship without any heart humility at all. It's possible to preach the Bible to others without any intention of obeying yourself. Or as the Bible puts it, to honour God with my lips, but my heart's to be far from you.

[4 : 57] And of all sins, hypocrisy has got a unique power. Hypocrisy has got a unique power to push God away, to hold God at distance, to hold Him at arm's length by pretending that you are good.

By pretending that you are real, for real. Let's just go through the motions. And I think what is wonderful here about this is that Jesus' words are so hopeful and heartening for all of us who are hypocrites.

Which means all of us. Sorry to tell you. I was once talking about it with an older minister. And we went somewhere and as often comes somebody asks us, what do you do?

The minister said, I'm a minister, absolutely I am too. And the person said, I can never go to church. Church is full of hypocrites. And the minister said, quick as a flash.

He smiled and said, well there's always room for one more. I said, great insults isn't it? You should use it. And so I think in the end we come away from this.

[6 : 06] It begins and it ends with great encouragement. And Jesus is going to give you, here this morning, the tools to cut through hypocrisy. And what he's going to show us, wonderfully, is that he is Lord and that he is greater than our hypocrisy.

And so the passage divides into two. And there's a paragraph at the end of chapter 22 and the paragraph at the start of 23. Two points. First of all, Jesus reveals that he is Lord.

And secondly, Jesus implies that he is Lord. So number one, Jesus reveals that he is Lord. That's 22, 41 to 46. So look at that passage. While the Pharisees, they gather together.

They're in a big group. They gather together and Jesus asks them a question. He goes right up to them with this question. And he is on the front foot. He's no longer on the defensive. And he says, what do you think about the Christ?

Whose son is he? And they say to him, don't they? Can you see this? They say to him, I'm the son of David. This is the big question.

[7 : 09] This is the elephant in the room. Because we've been during Matthew's gospel for 550 weeks. And we can miss this, I think. But it's a big deal.

They know it. The son of David. When he came in Jerusalem. When he cleaned the temple. When he healed people. They say to him, where do you get this authority from, Jesus?

Who do you think you are? And now he takes their lives in his hands. And his life in their hands.

And he gives them an answer from their own scriptures. It's an explanation of who he is. The Christ just means Messiah.

God's anointed king. The Old Testament king. Who God had promised to David. A thousand years before Jesus came. The Christ is also called the son of David.

Because God promised the great king David. A descendant. A descendant who would rule forever. And so if you've been with us through Matthew's gospel. You will know that the son of David is a big deal in Matthew's gospel.

[8 : 11] The first word in Matthew's gospel. Do you remember what they are? The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. The son of David. It comes up, doesn't it?

Again and again. Moments of key recognition of Jesus. So do you remember when Jesus gets to Jerusalem. Twice he's called the son of David. And the crowd as he comes to introduce them.

They say, Hosanna to the son of David. My favorite is back in chapter 21 and verse 15. Just in case you missed it. The chief priests and the scribes.

See Jesus in the temple. And they see the wonderful thing that he's doing. And that he does healing people. And they hear children crying out in the temple. Hosanna to the son of David.

And the religious leaders. They are furious. They're indignant. And they say to Jesus. Do you hear what they're saying? Do you hear what they're calling you? And Jesus said to them yes. Have you never read.

[9 : 08] Out of the mouths of babes and infants. And nursing babies. God you've prepared for age. Now here is the background. David was the greatest Israelite ever.

David was a man after God's own heart. He is the sweet Samist of Israel. Do you remember? He conquered Philistines. He killed Goliath.

He conquered God's enemies. There's nobody who gets higher on the tree. In the Old Testament. In the Old Testament. The David. And God made a special promise.

To King David. That he would have a descendant. David you will have a son. Who would rule after you. And God will establish. That throne of that descendant.

That Messiah. That King. And he will rule forever and ever. And it is absolutely ridiculous. To these leaders in Jerusalem. That Jesus. Should even pretend.

[10:05] That he is the son of David. It is embarrassing. He can't be no Philistines. Didn't even have one wife. He didn't raise an army. Couldn't use a sword.

Didn't even have a coin. It is deeply offensive. But the son of David. Should be the same sentence of Jesus. Jesus. But Jesus' question.

Shows that they've got it. Completely the wrong way around. He was indeed. The son of David. But way more. They thought. Those religious leaders. That they had a really high view.

Of the son of David. But Jesus shows them. That their view. Of the son of David. Was woefully inadequate. And here we need to pay. Close attention. To how Jesus asks the question. So Jesus asks.

Doesn't he. Whose son is he? How very small is he? And the leaders give the Sunday school answer. Simple answer. He's the son of David. But Jesus doesn't finish there.

[11:03] And neither does David. That doesn't finish the question. It still hangs. It needs a deeper. More wonderful answer. And that has to do with God. Coming to be with us. And so.

You'll know that if you. Be with us on Matthew's Gospel. There's a massive hint. Something there. The previous chapter we form. Three parables. Jesus referred to himself. Again and again and again.

As not just the son of David. But the son of God. He is the chief cornerstone. He is the one. The one in peace is thrown.

And so. Verse 43. Okay. How is it then. That David. In the spirit. Calls him Lord. Saying. The Lord God said. To my Lord.

Sit in my right hand. Until I put your enemies. Under your feet.

[12:00] So if then. David calls him Lord. How then is he. David's son. It's a quote from Psalm 110. I think David.

Who wrote him obviously. Is speaking about somebody. Who is far superior to him. He calls this person. My Lord. He cannot just be speaking. About a human descendant.

But a Messiah. Who is going to be his son. It doesn't make any sense. To call his descendants. Descendant. My Lord. Does it? And in this Psalm.

Jesus is saying. That David. Vows his kingship. And does homage. To his descendant. Because this descendant. Is not just going to sit.

On a throne of gold. He's going to sit. On the highest throne. In the cosmos. At the right hand of God. The Father in heaven. And David is prophesying. That the coming Messiah.

[12:56] Will be my Lord. He says. So the Messiah. Is not just descended from David. He is much greater than David. He sits on a throne in heaven. Imagine this is astonishing.

Here in the gospel. Do you know what Jesus is driving at? He's driving at. His incarnation. He's driving at. That God. Became. A man. And the only way.

This Psalm. Is true. Is if the Messiah. This king. Is divine. If he is God. In the flesh. If he is. Emmanuel. God. With us. So he's.

Saying here. Is he. I'm not just. The son of David. I'm the son of God. And you want to know. Where my authority comes from. Here I am.

I am David's Lord. I am the Lord of all. And it is absolutely. Mind-blowing. The closest Israel ever got.

[13:55] In the Old Testament. And to draw near to God. To be near to God. Was Mount Sinai. And the mountain shook. As in the centre.

Thunder was heard. There was darkness all around. There were deafening trumpets. And in the centre of the darkness. Was fire. Coming down. Going right from the top of the mountain. And it says literally.

That the people. Gathered with Moses. And they said. We're going to die. We're going to die. If we keep hearing the voice of God. So you go up there. Instead Moses. You go up. But what is so shocking here.

Is. Jesus the man. Is saying. He is Lord. Jesus the human. Jesus the vulnerable. Jesus the completely human one.

His unbelievable humility. Of the son of God. To take on the human flesh. Entering Jerusalem. On a donkey. Walking the path of humility. Going to the cross.

[14 : 54] Praying for the forgiveness. Of those who nailed him to the tree. This is what he does. With his lordship. And that is what is really going on here. A thousand years before.

The fruit of Jesus in Bethlehem. When this psalm was written. God knew exactly. How the son of David. Would be David's lord. The son of David. Infinitely superior.

To any of the Israelites. In the old testament. Came from heaven. Looking at him in the face. God draws very close. God. And as David's lord.

He is the lord. And lord of all. And if only they could see it. Those religious leaders. They would be saved. It's very encouraging to know.

That he is lord of all. It's very encouraging to know that. As they gather to put him to death. That it was no surprise. To God in heaven. That they are about to put him to death. He has enemies.

[15 : 56] And the great irony of course. Is that through his death. And through his resurrection. God will make all those. Who make themselves enemies. His enemies. Well he'll put them under Jesus' feet.

Including those here. Who want to do away with him. We are on the cusp. Aren't we. Of the most terrible suffering. For Jesus. At their hands. And he is trying to reach out to them in love.

Trying to reach out to them. Through their own scriptures. Jesus is the son of God. And Lord. And you know. If he is the key to life. And is the key to everything. That God is doing.

It explains to us. Doesn't it. Why Jesus can. Reveal with such clarity. And such authority. Who God is. And what heaven is like. What hell is that. And what it means to belong to the kingdom.

And that is why the Lord Jesus. Is so strangely attractive. As you read of him. And desirable to us. He is Lord. Secondly.

[16 : 55] Then Jesus applies his lordship. Here we are in. In 23. 1 to 12. And he applies his lordship. In two directions. Number 1. 2. The religious leaders. And then to the disciples.

In verse 1. He turns to the crowds. And his disciples. So firstly. He applies his lordship. To these leaders. Here is the problem. And you can say. This morning. Yes.

Everything that I have said. Already. And you can know it to be true. But still hold God at arm's length. Can't you?

And the way we do that. Is by hypocrisy. By saying something outwardly. But inwardly. Refusing him. And this is the great sin.

Of Matthew's gospel. It is the one known sin. That refuses the lordship of Jesus. It's hypocrisy. It's not that hypocrisy diminishes.

[17 : 53] It's not that hypocrisy diminishes. Or makes less Jesus lordship. In any way. But hypocrisy has got a uniquely effective way. Of turning a heart away from Jesus. Of placing ourselves outside the kingdom.

While we pretend to others. And to ourselves. That we are good. Now to be fair. I think these leaders.

Here are not deliberately insincere. They are not cynical about God. But in their attempt. To try and do what they could.

They developed an approach to faith. And to life. That was focused on the approval of others. And not the approval of God. And when you are focused.

On the approval of others. It becomes a kind of. Spiritual force field around you. That makes you impervious. Makes you unable to be affected.

[18 : 55] By the grace of God. The love and the knowledge. And the joy of God. These people. They were daily dealing with the Bible. And the things of God.

But it was the audience around them. That had replaced the fear of God. And it's a terrible thing to fall into. And that's exactly how religious hypocrisy works.

Over time. Appearance. Becomes more important. Than reality. Look at verse. 3. Of chapter 23. Look what it says.

And they preach. But they don't practice. And they tie up heavy burdens. And they lay them on people's shoulders. But they themselves. Are not willing to move them with their fingers.

It's so different. To the teaching of Jesus. And so the religious leaders. They've got these strings. And they've got these ropes. And you. You know these arcane.

[19 : 59] Semantic. Abstract. Hermeneutical. Theological arguments. They've tied up the Old Testament. With all these major commands. And minor commands. And then they've got the ropes.

And crumb. Lifted them on the people's shoulders. With great certainty. And authority. But they don't obey the commands.

They don't apply to the rest. They say. And they don't lift up the finger. To obey their own teaching. Now. Why? Why does Jesus say this happens? Verse 5.

Is the great clue. They do all their deeds. To be seen by others. And they make their black things. Roll that. Those containers. We talked about them last week. Holding a staple from the law. And their fringes. Long kind of religious gear. And they love their place.

[20 : 54] Of honour at feasts. And they love their best seats. At the synagogues. And the greetings in the marketplaces. And being called rabbis by others. It's hypocrisy.

And in Jesus' day. The word hypocrite meant. Actor. Or actors. An actor on stage. And being an hypocrite.

Being an actor. Takes time. And it takes skill. And to be a good actor. It takes practice. To get good at it. And so actors.

Need. Elocution. Lessons. So that they can. Deliver. And they need. Training for how to master. Actions. And inflections.

And so actors. And actresses. They practice. In front of a mirror. And they learn. Gestures. And kind of micro expressions. So that they can perform well. So that they can convince.

[21 : 53] To the audience. So they are someone else. Jesus said. The word could have a positive meaning. Or a negative meaning. But when Jesus uses it. It is always entirely negative.

Saying one thing in your life. Of faith. And doing another. It's living alive. We've got a really contemporary. Form of this.

It's called. Virtue signaling. Do you know what that is? Virtue signaling. It's been around us for a few years. And by virtue signaling.

We say to people. How morally superior we are. We do it. In a sophisticated way. And we say that we either love something. Or we hear something.

So for example. I'll try to think of one. I don't think it affects anyone here. But if I was to say. I hate those pollution loving. 4x4 drivers. What am I really saying?

[22 : 52] I'm saying. I'm saying. By kind of. Voicing that. They don't care. About the environment. As much as I do. That's the way we work.

I'm better than them. Because. I'm more concerned about the environment. They are. If you go to the shop. Whole Foods. I don't know why I was in there. It's not the kind of place.

I go in there. But if you go to Whole Foods. It's got a huge poster inside. And it says this. We are part of a growing consciousness. That is bigger than food.

One that champions what is good. So go to Whole Foods. I shop in here. Do you see it? We are part of a growing consciousness.

That is bigger than food. We're better. One that champions what is good. If you shop in Whole Foods. It's interesting. It's interesting. All the moral outrage that is out there.

[23 : 50] Distracts others. From the fact that what we're really trying to say. Is that we are better than others. And it's no surprise. Is it? It's no surprise that many professional actors.

What are they experts at? They are experts. Aren't they? At virtue signaling. Because it's a unique form of sin to us.

It's like a deliberate form of spiritual blindness. So here's what I want you to see. That has really helped me this week. How does hypocrisy work? If you write notes. Write this down.

We begin by deceiving others. And we end up deceiving ourselves. And that's why hypocrisy is so so dangerous in church life. We begin by deceiving other people.

But we end up deceiving ourselves. And so the more applause we get from other people. The more dangerous it is for us. It enables you and I to pretend that we are better than we really are.

[24 : 48] So we hold Jesus at arm's length. And we pretend that things are okay. We hide our sin. We say the right things. But there's no reality behind it. So what are we hypocrites to do?

How do we reverse the deadening effects of hypocrisy? It is not trying harder. But I think what Jesus does wonderfully at the end of this passage. He gives you three concrete ways.

That can certainly reverse hypocrisy on a day to day basis. And I want to finish with these. Three practices. He's applying here to the disciples. And so number one.

Is the direct experience. Of the Lord Jesus himself teaching us. Through the Bible. Through his word. Again and again in the New Testament.

After Jesus had gone to heaven. The apostles wrote to the church. Churches of people. Churches of people that had never heard Jesus in the flesh. And they never met Jesus in the flesh.

[25 : 48] Churches of people. And they say things like this. Faith comes by hearing. And hearing from Christ preaching. Churches of people. the translators of the Greek they can't possibly mean that Jesus is actually preaching to this congregation in Rome but he is he says the same thing in Ephesians, he says it in a number of places in other words, as we hear the Bible preached you don't listen to my voice but you begin to hear the voice of Jesus Christ himself and if we don't then the whole exercise becomes a kind of mutual spiritual status of superiority look what Jesus says in verse 8 you are not to be called Rabbi Rabbi means great way he's saying you are all brothers brothers and sisters you're all on a level and call no man father on earth because you have one father who is in heaven neither be called instructors for you have one instructor the Christ he is not saying there that you shouldn't have teachers and you shouldn't have preachers any more than you shouldn't have earthly fathers don't misunderstand what Jesus is saying but what he's saying the whole silly game of titles and spiritual status he came which is so much part of the marketplace it has no place among us

I was at a conference once where an archdeacon was speaking the archdeacon the title for an archdeacon is the venerable it's called the venerable Paul changes his name and that's how he was introduced the venerable and then the guy who was introducing him said are we to venerate you look what's ridiculous it's ridiculous we have one instructor that kind of silly one-adventure titles all this sort of stuff spiritual speakers it has no place we have one instructor Jesus Christ himself personally and so when we hear God's word preached we have direct communion with the Lord Jesus Christ and our hearts burn within us and faith is created and strengthened and it begins to undermine the hypocrisy this will be under the preaching of God's word hearing the voice of Jesus Christ as the person directly as the Bible is preached the second is this in verse 11 and it is actively serving each other it is a concrete thing that we can do that we reach out in love to other people we actually do something that means every gathering of Christians is not a private spiritual exercise for spiritual consumption it's meant to be a chance to serve so when you come on a Sunday or you gather in a small group or you help out on the road or you help out with the children young people the thought it's not what is in it for me but how can I serve and encourage others instead and that shows itself during the week isn't it being in touch with one another popping in or one another having coffee sending texts because if it's only on a Sunday how Christianity but it's just hypocrisy actively serving one another hearing the voice of Jesus and then 30 and finally it means genuinely humbling ourselves look at verse 12 humbling ourselves before Jesus whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted and so they're mutually exclusive if we exalt him we can't do we can't do one without the other it'll mean we humble ourselves if we exalt him we'll gradually demote the opinion of others if we humble ourselves we'll exalt him you cannot exalt yourself and exalt Jesus at the same time and I think what this means is what we've done this morning is ongoing repentance it means isn't it continually coming to the Lord Jesus and asking for his help not trying to cover up my sin not trying to pretend that it's not there but saying to God and to others

I've done it again I've done it again I've done it again give me grace help me to be humble help me humble myself and your mighty hand we don't try and cover it up but he says and we keep coming back to this verse again and again and again don't we Jesus says come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke and follow you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for yourselves for my yoke is easy and my goodness light Amen Let's pray