

Matthew 23:13-15. Christ Denounces Three Woes Against the Pharisees.

by Favell Lee Mortimer

The sermon highlights the dangers of hypocrisy, secret sin, and false teachings, and warns against the consequences of rejecting God's teachings.

Scripture: Matthew 23:13

Topics: "Hypocrisy Exposed", "False Teaching"

Description

Favell Lee Mortimer delves into the contrast between the blessings and woes pronounced by Jesus, focusing on the Pharisees' hypocrisy and false teachings. Jesus exposes the Pharisees' righteousness as a mere facade, concealing secret wickedness and leading others astray. He condemns their actions of shutting the kingdom of heaven against men, devouring widows' houses, and making proselytes for selfish gain, warning of the severe consequences awaiting hypocrites and false teachers.

Transcript

The first sermon recorded which the Lord Jesus preached is called the Sermon on the Mount. It began with eight blessings, such as these, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek." But now we are reading the last sermon recorded, and we find in it eight woes. They are denounced against the Pharisees. The Lord warned his disciples against their evil doctrines and example in his first public discourse, saying, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall in nowise enter the kingdom of heaven." He shows in this his last discourse what their righteousness was--a mere pretense, an outward show, a cloak to secret wickedness. After each woe he uttered, he described a crime.

The first crime described is "shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men." This is the contrary of what Jesus came to do. He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He opened it by his death. All faithful ministers stand at the open door and invite sinners to come in. But the Pharisees taught men false ways of salvation. When they saw real penitents they frowned upon them, and endeavored to shut them out. We find in the prophet Daniel this encouraging promise--"Those who be wise shall shine as the brightness of the skies, and those who turn many to righteousness as the stars forever." (Dan. 12:3.) But what will become of those who have turned many from righteousness! What anguish will they feel when they find among their companions in torment, many whom they once perverted and corrupted!

But if the Pharisees had been openly wicked they would not have been as guilty as they were. They pretended to be very pious, and made long prayers in public places, while secretly they devoured widows' houses. It seems that dying men often left the property of their widows to their charge, little suspecting how the trust would be abused. How could they dare to injure the widow and the fatherless when they read continually in the law of Moses these words--"You shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they shall cry at all unto me, I will hear their cry, and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless." Ex. 22:22-24. Christ is acquainted with every secret sin. He detests sin most when he sees it covered by a cloak of hypocrisy. Therefore he said to the Pharisees, "You shall receive the greater damnation." There are degrees of misery. Hypocrites shall be punished more than open transgressors. The sins which they have so carefully concealed from men will be publicly exposed at the last day, and the secrecy with which they were committed will be found to add to their enormity.

Everyone would acknowledge that to devour widows' houses is a sin; but everyone would not understand at first that it was a sin to compass sea and land to make proselytes. It is not a sin to compass sea and land to make converts--no, that is a righteous act. Missionaries go to the farther ends of the earth to tell perishing sinners of a Savior. They go, and by the blessing of God, they make some of them the children of heaven, such as they are themselves. What is a proselyte? He is a man who changes his religion, whether for a better or a worse. The Pharisees took great pains to persuade the Gentiles to observe the ceremonies of the Jewish law; for it gratified their pride to add to the number of their own followers. They did not desire to save souls; for while they were so zealous in making proselytes, they shut up the kingdom of heaven against men. The bad instructions they gave to a proselyte rendered him worse than he was before, and even worse than themselves. We should have hardly thought it possible that any could be worse than the Pharisees, did we not find these words written, "And when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." There are degrees of wickedness as well as of misery. Some are more the children of hell than others. It is even possible to make another worse than we are ourselves. How dangerous it must be to listen to false teachers! If we attend to them we may become worse than they are. How dreadful is the name here given to a wicked man! "The child of hell!" Yet all who are not the children of heaven are the children of hell. The world is divided into these two classes. Could the children of hell see the place to which they were going, they would tremble, and shrink back with fear. But God sees it, and in his love he warns them not to proceed in their dangerous course. He does more. He is willing to make them "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints of light;" for he is able to deliver them from "the power of darkness." (Col. 1:12, 13.)

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