A person once wrote, “You can be sure if someone says, “I hope you don’t mind me saying this….you are going to mind.” No one comes to church hoping to explore the subject of hypocrisy and no one even likes to entertain the idea of how they themselves may be hypocritical. But that is exactly what we are going to do today.

Last week in the message “Your Might Be A Hypocrite If...” we discussed the fact that we all have the potential to be hypocrites, what we have to decide is if we are recovering hypocrites. Today as look on as Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees we must ask ourselves if we see within ourselves any of the same tendencies that the Pharisees exhibited?

Chapter twenty-three contains the last words which the Lord Jesus ever spoke within the walls of the Temple in Jerusalem. Those last words consist of a withering exposure of the Scribes and Pharisees, and a sharp rebuke of their doctrines and practices. Knowing full well that His time on earth was drawing to a close, our Lord no longer keeps back His opinion of the leading teachers of the Jews. Knowing that He would soon leave His followers alone, like sheep among wolves, He warns them plainly against the false shepherds, by whom they were surrounded.

“Just as the public ministry of the King began with eight beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12), so it closed with eight curses poured out on the nation (and its leaders) that rejected him.”

To understand what Jesus says here we have to first understand what term “woe” means because Jesus introduces each his indictments against the Pharisees with this word. Woe is an expression of deep distress or misery as from grief. The woes call for judgment, yet they say there is time for repentance. The judgment is almost but not quite, here. Jesus’ woes offer repentance even at the last minute.

First, You Are Creating Barriers to God. (23:13)

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.”
Jesus is saying that the Pharisees were standing in the way of others who apart from them might find salvation. They shut the door to the kingdom of heaven by teaching a version of salvation by works. According to their view if you believed in the God of Israel, avoided the really big sins and were basically obedient to God, then you would enter Heaven. They did not proclaim salvation by grace alone, through faith alone. By perverting the gospel, the Pharisees led people away from Jesus.

When Mahatma Gandhi, Hindu spiritual leader of India, was asked by some missionaries, “What is the greatest hindrance to Christianity in India?” His reply was, “Christians.” Tragically that can still be true, but we surely don’t want it said of us that because of the inconsistencies in our lives that anyone is turn away from following Christ!

**Second, You Are Practicing Religion For Personal Gain.** (23:14)

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.*

According to the Talmud it was the custom of the day for a husband to appoint a scribe to be the executor of his will upon his death and to see to the welfare of man’s property and his widow. ([The Complete Biblical Library: New Testament; Matthew. p. 497](#)) Apparently sometimes this trust is used as a means of cheating the widow.

Afraid that at the judgment some of the television preachers of our own day will stand accountable for scheming to get money from widows and people on fixed incomes, with the notion that by giving sacrificially to this men’s ministries they will gain material blessing.

**Third, You Are Zealous but Wrong.** (23:15)

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.*

The zeal of the Pharisee was praiseworthy, the problem was their zeal was misplaced. They were not concerned with being a light to the Gentiles they were concerned with turning Jews into Pharisees.

Let me try to illustrate what it means when it says their converts are “twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.” If you are a smoker or a person who struggles with your weight the last person you want to be around in a reformed smoker or a person who thinks they have discovered “the” secret to weight loss. They have a passion that is exhausting.

So too the converts of the Scribes and Pharisees are even more legalist than the people who taught them. The Book of Acts shows that in his travels the Apostle Paul’s greatest opposition came from the Judaizers who were Hellenistic Jews.
There is a reminder here that we are not called to point people to our group but to Jesus!

**Fourth, You Are Perverting the Truth.** (23:16-22)

"Wo[e to you], blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' (17)

Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?

(18) And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.'

(19) Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

(20) Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it.

(21) He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. (22) And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it."

In this particular “woe” He called them “blind guides” rather than hypocrites. To prove their spiritual blindness He refers to their absurd rules concerning vows. They had developed a tradition that said that a vow made by swearing on the Temple was not binding, while a vow made on the gold of the Temple was binding. The religious leaders had developed a similar regulation concerning the altar and the gift.

This is really about creating religious loopholes that would leave a way of escape in case they changed their minds. As we listen to the Pharisees doctrinal calisthenics you can’t help but make the comparison to children who say, “It doesn’t count I had my fingers crossed.”

Jesus attacks their faulty logic by asking “Which is greater?” (vv. 17, 19). In so doing Jesus exposed the erroneous distinctions made by the Pharisees between binding and non-binding oaths. Jesus says that all vows are binding because – all oaths are made before God (Eccles 5:4-5). Earlier in His Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that a man of integrity does not need to make a vow – his word was enough. Jesus said, “But I tell you, Do not swear at all… simply let your Yes, be Yes, and No, be No; Anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” (Matt 5:34, 37- NIV)

**Fifth, You Are Stressing the Wrong Things.**

(23:23-24)

"Wo[e to you], scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. (24) Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”
The Pharisees were scrupulous and exact when it came to the matter of tithing. But they took this even further than commanded. We encourage people to give a tithe or 10 percent of their paycheck back to the church but the Pharisees believed in giving a tithe of everything they owned, even their spices! Can you imagine bringing a tenth of the produce from your garden. A tenth of your tomatoes, a tenth of your cucumbers, a tenth of corn and tenth of your peas. Even a tenth of your okra. (Which should be brought directly to the pastor’s office) Just kidding. Talk about extreme!

The problem was that the Pharisees forgot what was really important to God; the matters of justice, mercy and faithfulness. They left out being kind, merciful, and just toward others and being faithful in service to one another.

Both gnats and camels were considered unclean (Lev 11:4, 41). The gnat represents the smallest of unclean insects. It is absurd to the point of humorous to consider swallowing an animal as large as a camel. The most legalistic of the Pharisees strained wine and other liquids so as not to inadvertently swallow any unclean insect. But the reason they did this was not the natural human disgust at the thought of swallowing an insect, any insect, it was because the gnat was consider unclean. But saying they were “swallowing a camel” (v. 24) He is pointing out the absurd inconsistency of their actions.

Dr. Bob Lowery tells about doing a consulting job with a congregation that was having some difficulties over worship styles. After talking to the church leadership, the church members were invited to an evening meeting where anyone was allowed to come to the microphone and speak their views on the issue. Some folks were very agitated and even hateful.

After Dr. Lowery heard everyone who wanted to speak, he stepped to the microphone to share his thoughts on what he heard. He asked, “Who, in hell, cares?” After allowing that question to sink in, he continued by saying, “Please don’t mistake what I said. I’m not trying to be vulgar. But the question remains, ‘Who, in hell, cares?’ What I mean by that is this: Who, having died and gone to hell, cares what kind of music you sing? Their concern is that you were too busy arguing over music to reach the lost. Now they’ve died and gone to hell. So, who, in hell, cares?”

Sixth, You Are Concerned Only With The External. (23:25-26)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. (26) Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.”

Jesus now uses another graphic word picture He says that the Pharisees are like people who wash only the outside of the cup, leaving the inside unclean (v. 26).
The idea of cleanliness was almost all consuming with the Pharisees. When we think about clean or unclean, we tend to think about things like dishes, or laundry or housework. But for the Jew being unclean meant something that could disrupt their relationship with God.

The rules about cleanliness as outlined for the people of Israel were designed to remind them that as the people of Jehovah God they were to live differently from the rest of the world. The problem of the Pharisees was that were very strict in obeying the rules but they missing the point of the rules.

One Sunday morning an old cowboy entered a church just before services were to begin. Although the old man and his clothes were spotlessly clean, he wore jeans, a denim shirt and boots that were very worn and ragged. In his hand he carried a worn out old hat and an equally worn out bible.

The Church he entered was in a very upscale and exclusive part of the city. It was the largest and most beautiful church the old cowboy had ever seen. The people of the congregation were all dressed with expensive clothes and accessories.

As the cowboy took a seat, the others moved away from him. No one greeted, spoke to, or welcomed him. They were all appalled at his appearance and did not attempt to hide it.

The preacher gave a long sermon about Hellfire and brimstone and a stern lecture on how much money the church needed to do God’s work. As the old cowboy was leaving the church, the preacher approached him and asked the cowboy to do him a favor. "Before you come back in here again, have a talk with God and ask him what He thinks would be appropriate attire for worship." The old cowboy assured the preacher he would.

The next Sunday, he showed up for the services wearing the same ragged jeans, shirt, boots, and hat. Once again he was completely shunned and ignored. The preacher approached the man and said, "I thought I asked you to speak to God before you came back to our church."

"I did," replied the old cowboy. "If you spoke to God, what did he tell you the proper attire should be for worshiping in here?" asked the preacher. "Well, sir, God told me that He didn’t have a clue what I should wear. He says He’s never been in this church!"

What we need to understand is that God is more interested the kind of person we are on the inside instead of looking great on the outside. He wants hearts and minds that are pure and loving. Because if we are that way on the inside, it will be seen on the outside in the way we live and treat others. But woe to those are corrupt within!

The obvious application to the Christian is that of concern for merely keeping up appearances. As long as we attend church, don’t curse too much, give a bit of money in the
it does not seem to matter whether we are dishonest in business, consumed with
material things, and cruel in our dealing with our family.

Seventh, You Are Whitewashed Tombs. (23:27-28)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which
indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all
uncleanness. (28) Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are
full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

In the season of the Passover graves were white-washed so that those making their
way to the city would not accidently come into contact with a grave and defile themselves. In
fact this whitewashing was occurring even as Jesus spoke these words. Yet no matter how
attractive these tombs were on the outside, on the inside they were still filled with putrefying
flesh and dead men's bones.

Eight, You Are Not As Good As You Think. (23:29-31)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets
and adorn the monuments of the righteous, (30) and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our
fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the
prophets.'(31)Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who
murdered the prophets”

These men pride themselves on the idea that if they had been living in the days of the
prophets, things would have been different they would have accepted them and honored
them. Yet they are not different than their forefathers.

Jesus is not condemning these men because of the sins of their fathers. He is
condemning them because they have learned nothing from the sins of their fathers.

Jesus rebukes the Pharisees because they honored the prophets as long as they were
dead. But just like those who were guilty of rejecting the prophets in the past, they had
rejected John the Baptist and even now were rejecting Him – the greatest of all prophets,
Jesus. At the very moment that He is speaking they were planning ways to kill Him! It is
possible to be very religious yet hate God's message and messengers!

The woes end gently with our Lord’s lament over Jerusalem (vv. 37-39) and an
invitation to turn to Him. These religious leaders have two choices, “fill up...the measure of
your fathers' guilt” (v. 32) or turn away from them. Even while Jesus is declaring the
judgment that will fall on Israel because of unbelief it is not too late to repent. He says that
they will bring to comple-tion what has already begun. And although He will continue to
send “prophets, wise men and scribes” they will be “killed” “crucified” and “scoured in your
synagogues” (v. 34). From beginning to end the Old Testament records the murder of the prophets. From Abel’s murder recorded in the book of Genesis to Zechariah’s murder recorded in 2 Chronicles (2 Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew Bible) (v. 35).

Even now He extends 40 years of grace during which they can repent before the destruction of Jerusalem would come in A.D. 70 by the Romans under Titus.

Luke in his account (Luke 19:4) tells us that Jesus wept as He looked over the city of Jerusalem, contemplated its coming judgment, and said these words. Jesus wanted to protect them from the terrible judgment that will follow their rejection of Him.

This heartfelt cry is another way to see that Jesus didn’t hate these men He rebuked so strongly. His heart broke for them. When we sin, God does not hate us, He genuinely weeps for us, knowing that in every way, our sin and rebellion only destroys our life.

Conclusion

It’s easy to shake our heads and say "Aw, those hypocrites." But what about the hypocrisy inside us?

See if this sounds familiar. There was a woman who was tailgating the driver in front of her. He stops at a light that was just turning from yellow to red, which was the right thing to do, by the way!

But the woman goes ballistic. She honks her horn. She rolls down her window and curses the driver ahead of her. Then she flipped him off.

Then she hears a tap on her window. She turns to see a police officer who says, "Please exit the vehicle." He arrests her, books her, and fingerprints her. Three hours later, she is free to go.

The officer says "Ma’am, I’m awfully sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping the guy off in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him. I noticed the "Choose Life" license plate holder, the "What Would Jesus Do?" bumper sticker, the "Follow me to Sunday School" bumper sticker and the chrome plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk."Naturally, I assumed you had stolen the car."

The woman appeared righteous based on the bumper stickers of her car. But on the inside, she was full of road rage.

Perhaps most of you know who “The Church Lady” a character created and played by Dana Carvey, as part of “Saturday Night Live” Show. The Church Lady is an elderly woman named “Enid Strict”, who is the uptight, smug and pious host of her own talk show, Church Chat.

John Fischer in his book, “12 Steps for a Recover-ing Pharisee” says, “I always liked the church lady. I saw in her the things I did not like about myself and the misleading
aspects of Christianity with which I am all too familiar. I never took her as an attack on my faith; I took her as an attack on everything that is false and hypocritical about Christianity. We really should point and laugh along with the world on this one. The joke is on us, and to a certain extent we deserve it.”  

[John Fischer. “12 Steps for a Recovering Pharisee” (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2000) p. 154]

In closing let me just give you three traits that we need to continually work on in our lives if we want to leave hypocrisy behind, Humility, Vulnerability, and Honesty.
Woe To The Hypocrite  
Matthew 23:13-39

- You Are Creating __________ to God. (23:13)

- You Are Practicing Religion For Personal _______. (23:14)

- You Are Zealous But _______. (23:15)

- You Are _______________ the Truth (23:16-22)

- You Are _____________ the Wrong Things. (23:23-24)

- You Are Concerned Only With The _____________. (23:25-26)

- You Are Whitewashed ___________. (23:27-28)

- You Are Not As ______ As You Think. (23:29-31)