

Homilies from the Hypocrites

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction: Matt. 23:1-39

- A. A sermon on the hypocrites has the potential to be very negative, even to the point of discouragement.
 - 1. Not the approach I am going to use. Hindsight leads us to say, "If I had it to do over again."
 - 2. What sermons would the hypocrites of Matthew 23 preach from the benefit of hindsight? "If we had it to do over again..."
- B. What is a hypocrite?
 - 1. Some are charged with hypocrisy when their walk does not measure up to their talk, or they do not practice what they preach.
 - 2. But that may be a result of weakness and not hypocrisy. They want to do right; they simply do not strive hard enough.
 - 3. Hypocrite comes from the Greek hupokrites (hoop-o-kree-tace), meaning an actor under an assumed character; stage-player (Strong's)
 - 4. A true hypocrite is one who pretends to be something he or she is not, and has no intention of becoming.
 - 5. God did not charge you with the responsibility to make this judgment about others.
- C. Jesus addressed hypocrites in His day, specifically, scribes and Pharisees...
 - 1. They were among the more religiously conservative of that age.
 - 2. Some of the harshest words Jesus ever spoke were directed to them
 - 3. In one sermon, he called them:
 - a. Hypocrites (7 times) - Matt. 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, 29
 - b. Fools (twice)
 - c. Blind guides (5 times) - Matt. 23:16-17, 19, 24, 26
 - d. Serpents, brood of vipers (once) - Matt. 23:33
- D. Despite such strong condemnation, we can learn from hypocrites.
 - 1. We can benefit from their teaching of God's word - Matt. 23:1-3
 - a. Don't automatically disregard the message even though the messenger is a hypocrite - Phil. 1:15-18
 - b. Look beyond the messenger to the original source of the message - Rom. 1:16
 - c. The power is in the Gospel, not the speaker.
 - 2. We can also learn how not to act, what kind of behaviors to avoid.
- E. What sermons would the hypocrites preach from the benefit of hindsight?

I. DO NOT ABUSE YOUR AUTHORITY

- A. I bound on others what I was unwilling to do.
 - 1. When speaking from Moses' seat in the synagogues, I spoke with authority.
 - 2. Unfortunately, I was binding things on others I was unwilling to do myself - Matt. 23:1-4
 - 3. This generates disrespect for all authority, including the Word of God.

4. If I want others to have high regard for God's word, then I must in such a way that manifests respect for God's word.
- B. I should not have done works to draw attention to myself, but rather to God
 1. When I did my works, I did them to be seen by others - Matt. 23:5
 2. I loved to dress up in religious clothing that gave appearance of devotion - Matt. 23:5
 3. Over time, people saw through the clothes to who I really was.
 4. If we desire God's approval, we need to do things to glorify God and to draw attention to Him, and at times to be seen only by Him.
 - a. Matt. 5:16, 6:1-18
- C. I should not have pursued attention and special treatment.
 1. I demanded the best seats and honorary titles - Matt. 23:6-7
 2. Jesus expected His disciples to be different - Matt. 23:8-12
 - a. He forbade the use of religious titles.
 - b. He taught humility as the key to greatness.

II. BE TRUE TO YOUR TEACHING

- A. I failed to save others.
 1. I failed to truly show others the way to the kingdom of heaven, and therefore failed to go in myself - Matt. 23:13
 2. Through my extra doctrines I rendered the commandments of God ineffective - Matt. 15:3-6
 3. My teaching came from a heart far removed from God - Matt. 15:7-9
 4. Effective teaching that saves others begins with myself - 1Tim. 4:16
- B. I used religion to take advantage of the vulnerable and weak and to impress others - Matt. 23:14
 1. 2Tim. 3:5-6; Titus 1:10-11; 1Tim. 6:3-6; 2Cor. 8:21
- C. I was so self-deluded that I made people worse than myself - Matt. 23:15
 1. By my emphasis on hobbies and other traditions of men, rather than on the word of God, I created a new denomination in my own image.
- D. I made distinctions where God did not - Matt. 23:16-22
 1. You can easily do similar things today.
 - a. Saying some commands of God are essential to salvation, while others are not.
 - b. Teaching our "think so's" and "it seems to me's" instead of telling people what the Bible really says and only what it says.
 2. To guard against this, "let us speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent" - 1Peter 4:11

III. DO NOT BE INCONSISTENT IN PRACTICE

- A. I got so focused on my new distinctions that I left many commands of God undone - Matt. 23:23-24
 1. I stressed tithing, but neglected justice, mercy, faith; I strained out gnats and swallowed camels
 2. Understand that all of God's commandments are important - Matt. 5:19
- B. I focused only on the outer man - Matt. 23:25-28

1. Concerned myself with meticulous ritual cleansing, and was willing to live with extortion, self-indulgence, hypocrisy and lawlessness.
 2. You can become guilty of having the wrong focus by stressing externals over internals: big buildings, large crowds, accepting family and friends into fellowship without challenging them to true repentance.
 3. We need to emphasize true repentance, a conversion of the inner man
 - a. Rom. 12:2
- C. I honored my heritage, but was unwilling to live up to it - Matt. 23:29-31
1. I probably would have rejected or even harmed my godly ancestors.
 - a. Matt. 23:32-34
 2. My generation and succeeding generations murdered all of God's New Testament prophets in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
 - a. Matt. 23:35-39
 3. We honor men like Jesus, Paul, and Peter, but are we willing to live what they preached?
 - a. Or, have we chosen to live with the 21st Century compromise with 1st Century Christianity?
 4. With the hypocrites, their primary interest was in what others thought of them based on how they acted in their presence.
 - a. They had little interest in what God saw when He looked at them.
 - b. They had no interest in what they saw when they looked inside.
 5. The true measure of your faith, the honest measure of my own faith is not what others see here at services, it is what God sees when we are alone or in the presence of the lost, it is what we see when we carefully look within ourselves.

Conclusion:

- A. Now that the hypocrites have passed into Hades, what lessons would they teach if they could send a sermon to us?
 1. I imagine many of them could preach this sermon from experience and with greater passion than I ever could.
- B. Speaking of hypocrites, some people avoid the church because "there are hypocrites there."
 1. There may be hypocrites in the church, but not as many as the judgmental sinner may think.
 - a. Remember, a hypocrite is not someone who teaches the truth but occasionally fails to live up to it; that's just a weak person.
 - b. A hypocrite is someone who teaches truth and has no intention to live it.
 - c. My question is this: Who gave the sinner the power to read the hearts of people trying to be Christians and judge their motives?
 - d. Ironic isn't it? The sinner who avoids Christians because he thinks they are judging him is guilty of judging Christians.
 - e. Leads me to ask who is the greater hypocrite, the Christian who tries and occasionally fails to practice what he preaches, or the sinner who judges him without truly knowing his heart?

f. I'll leave that up to God.

C. Even conceding that there may be hypocrites in the church is no reason to reject the Gospel.

1. Did the hypocrisy of Judas Iscariot empower the rest of the apostles to leave Jesus?
2. Do you allow the presence of hypocrites keep you from enjoying other activities (sports events, vacations, etc.)?
3. Which is better, to spend a short time with hypocrites in the church, or to spend eternity with hypocrites in hell?
4. Remember what Jesus said of the hypocrites: "How can you escape the condemnation of hell?" - Matt. 23:33