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Why Absolute Truth is so Absolutely Important; Matt 23:13-24

GPBC

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Introduction – After Jesus warns His disciples and the crowds in vv1-12 to not allow the Pharisees to be their spiritual influencers, He then pronounces 7 woes against the Pharisees. In doing so, Jesus explains why allowing the Pharisees to be your spiritual guide would be so eternally detrimental.

What are these “woes”? Well it’s not the woe used to command a horse to stop. It’s not the woe used to signify pity. When Jesus pronounces a woe, it is an act of divine judgment. Woe is the opposite of blessed. If you recall in Matt 5:3-11, Jesus pronounces 9 blessings. We call these the beatitudes. In other words, in these 9 statements Jesus is describing the life of a true believer, and therefore, blessed indicates eternal, spiritual blessing. Woe is the opposite. When Jesus uses these 7 woe statements He is describing the life of an unbeliever, and therefore, these 7 woes indicate eternal ruin and condemnation.

Throughout these 7 woes Jesus refers to the religious elite as hypocrites – they fail to live the faith they claim to believe, He calls them blind guides – not only are they deceived but their influence is deceiving others, and He calls them blind fools – the path of darkness they follow is a foolish path for no matter their zeal, it ends in destruction.

But there is a broader application here for us as well. Jesus is teaching in ch23 that pretending to be true believers is eternally destructive to you and to those you influence. But in so doing, by extension He is also teaching that any departure from the absolute truth of Scripture as revealed by the One true God and any deviation from the absolute gospel of salvation in none other than Jesus is a path of eternal ruin. This entire chapter confronts our current cultural philosophy that rejects absolute truth and defines truth as subjective and determined individually. That’s why we hear cliches today like “Follow your own truth, find your own truth” as if we actually determine ultimate reality.

If everyone has their own truth, then there really is no truth. Truth dissolves into nothing more than a variety of opinions and individual beliefs. All of which may sound good in theory, but it becomes impossible to live because of the inevitable

moral collapse. But even more critical, it creates a cloud of despair and doubt when you come to the end of life with one looming question – what if your truth turns out to not be true? You see absolute truth is absolutely important.

- I. False Religion will Keep You From Heaven (vv13-15)
 - a. These verses contain the first two woes. Both woes arise from the same error, they produce the same result, but they apply to two different groups of people.
 - i. The fundamental error is that their list of rules and rituals and obligations which appear as spirituality are nothing more than heavy burdens and impossible obstacles to genuine faith. (v4)
 - ii. In v13 they prevent the spiritually weary and thirsty from arriving at true life because they have constructed a wall of religion that is too difficult to climb. The weary thirsty soul longs for the answers to heart and soul but looking at the barricade and maze of rigorous rule-keeping concludes its hopeless. I can never live up to that standard. I can never be perfect. If this is the gate to heaven, I'll never get in. They literally shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces by leading them to the wrong door. A wrong door that even they themselves can't enter.
 - iii. In v15 Jesus addresses the ones who embrace the path of the Pharisees. They completely buy into it. So much that their followers go even further than them. One commentator said, these proselytes "out-Pharisee" the Pharisees. History has taught us over and over again that followers of zealots will often pursue their ideology with more zeal. These conclude if keeping these rules is how I enter heaven, then I am determined to be the best rule-keeper that has ever lived. Only to find at the end of life that in keeping their list of rules they neglected to keep the most important of all commands – to believe in the Son of God.
 - b. The problem with false religion is that it will keep you from heaven and send you to hell. Whether it distracts you from the true way or convinces you that it is the true way – the result is the same.
 - c. The truth that false religion leads you away from heaven and into hell does not just apply to a false presentation of Christianity, it also

applies to any false path. Islam, Hinduism, agnosticism – we can't know truth, atheism and naturalism – there is no God, humanism and secularism – we are our own paths, and the new trend of the "nones" – I don't believe anything, I adhere to no belief system.

- d. In the end all of these have the same result – shutting the kingdom of heaven in people's faces.
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- II. False Religion Offers Spirituality without Substance (vv16-22)
 - a. In the third woe Jesus confronts the empty shell of spirituality. The appearance of great spiritual commitment that is actually a veil that hides a lack of spiritual commitment.
 - b. Jesus is confronting the loophole the Pharisees have created that allows them to make large, impressive, public oaths but internally they have no plan to keep them. So for their easy oaths, they swear by the gold of the temple. The oaths that do not require any effort but still make it on the list of spiritual accomplishments. III. Being at the synagogue But for those oaths that require much sacrifice and are difficult to keep and are private so no one knows if you keep them or not – swear by the temple. III. Fasting
 - c. Now if you have to create a loophole in order to maintain the appearance of spirituality, that should tell you your spiritual path is empty. On the other hand, we might not make loopholes for our commitments, but we do make excuses sometimes.
 - d. A false spiritual path will create an inviting charming presentation. Here's how you can be spiritual without really being spiritual. When you boil down the words – find your own truth and live it – it just means do whatever you want to do. Wherever your desires take you, whatever you want, wherever your heart leads – go for it. That is true freedom.
 - e. Oh that sounds good. That sounds freeing. That sounds spiritual. But the fact is that's nothing more than old shell of sin and down deep inside where no one sees but God – it's empty.
 - f. That's exactly what Jesus reminds the Pharisees of in v22 – false religion doesn't change the fact that God still sits on the throne.
 - III. False Religion Offers Rules without Righteousness (vv23-24)

- a. In this fourth woe Jesus confronts how false religions love to go through the motions and steps and rituals to present a righteousness – a right way of living and believing but fails to adhere to what is actually righteous – what is actually right living and believing.
- b. The OT commanded tithe of grain so the Pharisees would make sure people watched as they presented their offerings of mint, dill, and cumin. Look at me – look how righteous I am – watch me tithe.
- c. But in using religious practice to put on a show of righteousness they missed the point of the whole law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness, true righteousness.
- d. Right standing with God, righteousness, is not determined by who people think you are but by who you truly are! And we truly are sinners apart from faith in Christ. Once the righteousness of Christ has been placed upon us it begins to transform us and rather than pursuing self we begin to pursue things like justice, mercy, and faithfulness.
- e. You see false religions can offer you rules, false systems can offer you steps, Christ offers you a new heart, a new life, and new hope.

Conclusion – Absolute truth is absolutely important for how you will live your life now and where you will spend eternity.

III. From point 2. Today's culture is drowning in the lies of the "born that way" ideology that claims desires and feelings cannot change or be overridden. Transgender to Transformed chronicles the story of Laura Perry, a former transgender, who believed those same lies and was determined to never return to being female no matter what it cost her. And cost her, it did.

Like many who feel trapped in the wrong body, Laura "transitioned" to the opposite sex through irreversible surgeries, hormone injections, and a legal name change. Yet, despite her initial elation at living as a male, her new identity failed to bring her the peace and fulfillment she longed for. Realizing that she was living a lie, what was promised to be freedom had instead become a prison cell.

Filled with raw, honest emotion, Laura's story sheds light on the common deceptions about the transgender lifestyle, and exposes the frustration and hopelessness of living with a self-created identity that is in opposition to who God created. It bravely leads the way out of the darkness and into the light of freedom that transgenders may desperately be seeking.