
INTRODUCTION

- As we read through the Gospels and observe the ministry of the Lord Jesus, one of the things that is clear is that He did not deal with people in a mechanical way. He did not use the same method of proclaiming the Gospel with every person. There were times of formal declaration in the synagogue with the Scriptures opened before Him, moving from the text to application. There were other times of personal audience, such as when Nicodemus comes to Him by night to speak with Him. There is the "change" meeting with the woman at the well. There is the zealous approach of the rich young ruler asking how he might inherit eternal life.
- What is striking is that there was not a "one size fits all" method of presenting the Gospel, nor even the same general outline of how He approached people. He knew them, and responded to them by teaching them the truths of God in a way most effective to who they were in their particular circumstance.
- In the same way, He didn't deal with people the same way not only in content, but also in attitude. While love was at the bottom of every interaction, his disposition toward different kinds of people is clearly distinctive. There are those that He deals with in great tenderness, and those He addresses with a shocking straightforwardness.
- As we read the Gospels, what is clear is that the way he dealt with the common people who heard Him gladly was different than the way he normally addressed the religious leaders as a group. There is a pointedness, some may even say a harshness, that demonstrates that Jesus was dead serious regarding them, and that there was something serious enough about them to deal with unrelenting directness. We come to one such example this morning in our text.

EXPOSITION

- We should first notice that Luke's account here is an abbreviation, and that Matthew gives a much longer version of the same event. Here it is marked out in 3 verses, and in Matthew 36 verses. I would encourage you, perhaps in your time at home this afternoon or evening, to read that lengthier account to see more fully what Jesus said in this event.
- These words are spoken as Jesus has entered Jerusalem in His "triumphal entry", there is great popularity at this time, and the religious teachers had been attacking Him in various ways to try to discredit Him among the people. Their efforts have failed, and now He goes after them and exposes them to the people
- We are told ***Then, in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples.*** Jesus is speaking primarily to His disciples, those who are committed followers of His. But He does this in the hearing of all the people, not privately. This is something He wants His disciples to know, but also the people at large. He wanted everyone to hear what He had to say, as it was of great importance to all.
- He says to His disciples in the presence of the people ***Beware of the scribes.*** The scribes were those who were employed in the task of the study and teaching of the Scriptures of what is now called the Old Testament. They were generally of the sect of the Pharisees, and zealous and conservative group of men. They truly had a wonderful job. They made their living in the copying and study of Scriptures. But in the process of the exercise of this office, they moved away from the centrality of the text of Scripture, and made commentaries and traditions which they eventually held in nearly the same authority of the Bible. Their interpretations and traditions became as authoritative as the Word of God itself.
- Jesus says of these men, "beware." This word means to pay close attention to something with caution. In this case, Jesus is warning them to watch with caution this particular group of teachers. He is going to give 6 things about them that are dangerous, and then a final reason all of which we'll consider together.
- Let me point out something here that is important to understand biblically. In Scripture, being a teacher was more than about imparting certain facts to people. Being a teacher was as much about a way of living as it was objective truth. This is seen in a passage like Luke 6:40 "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher." Completion of training includes, to some degree, the imparting of the lifestyle of the teacher. How different this is from the educational philosophies of our day.
- We should recognize how this truth impacts our lives in at least three ways
 - (1.) Our relationship with our children. How we live before them, not just our theology, has an incredible impact on them.
 - (2.) The educational choices for our children. It isn't just what "facts" they are getting, but what are the character examples they are getting from those we choose to educate them, especially in their most pliable years.
 - (3.) The importance of those that we choose to influence us as Christians. We cannot separate the lives of those who teach us from their teaching. That is why the primary influence of people in our lives is to be those we know "up close." This should make us especially cautious with the availability we have to masses teaching on the Internet.
- So these men are dangerous primarily because of how they were living. Their lives were the outworking of their beliefs, and if their lives were corrupt, at heart their teaching was corrupt. And therefore Jesus says, "beware." We should see in this not only instruction to His disciples, but also to at least two other groups. This was a warning to the general population that heard Him. He is communicating that the hypocrisy of these men was not true spirituality. Their teachings and application of the Word were not true, as evidenced by how they live.

- In this the scribes themselves were also warned. This itself was an act of grace to them, and a call to repent from their errors.
- Here then, are the six errors of life of which we are to be particularly leery, broken down into three categories:
 - 1.) ***Their pursuit of reputation***
 - ***Who desire to go around in long robes*** – These men were considered specialists. Their learning and knowledge had become a badge, and there was respect expected because of this. But their authority and influence wasn’t seen merely in the knowledge of Scripture, but was to be reflected in their outward dress. They had externalized their religion to the point that they carried their so-called superior spirituality by their special dress. I cannot help but to think of forms of Christian religion where this is just what happens. Special robes and garments are worn for the purpose of demonstrating special positions. What a contrast to the Son of God, coming in the ordinary garb of men.
 - By way of clarification, Jesus is not condemning the practice of dressing appropriately for an occasion. The Scripture talks about the special dress of the bride in the wedding, and of the man who is thrown out of the feast because he is not dressed appropriately. This doesn’t preclude our desire to reflect how the public worship of God is special to us as reflected in wearing things appropriate to the occasion, within the means we have.
 - What Jesus is warning us of is equating spirituality with a certain kind of dress. And with these men, they constantly went about in the long robes to try to show just how spiritual that they were. Jesus says, “beware.”
 - ***Love greetings in the marketplaces*** – From what we read in the fuller account in Matthew is that these men desired that, when in a public place like the marketplace among all the people, that people would call out their title. These included “Rabbi”, “teacher”, “father.” It wasn’t that they loved the people, and were glad to see them, but they loved the “greetings.” They wanted the badge of the superior spirituality to be clearly displayed among the people and by the people. They wanted the public recognition.
 - ***The best seats in the synagogues*** – In the layout of the synagogue, there were special arrangements of seats that showed how one was esteemed among the people. Their desire, in the midst of hearing the Word of God, was that people would clearly see how important they were.
 - ***And the best places at feasts*** – When feasts were held for celebration of special days, or in honor of someone, those tables were arranged in a certain way. In their customs to sit in a certain arrangement, to be next to the one being honored, all of these things were worked out in detail. These men would jockey for position, again so that they would receive public recognition of their importance and superior spirituality.
 - 3.) ***Their selfish treatment of the vulnerable***
 - ***Who devour widows’ houses*** – This is perhaps the most atrocious error that Jesus has pointed out so far, though the next one will also be greatly abhorrent. In this, Jesus is pointing out that in the name of God and the temple, these men would use their position of influence to hurt widows. We don’t know the details, but it seems that these men would convince the widows to give them rights over their estate and property. These men would then use the widow’s goods for their own use. They weren’t really concerned about helping them, only about using them. Despite the many warnings they had in their own Scriptures, they took advantage of the poor, exacting from them their meager means for their own profit. And we can be sure this is only one example of this kind of abuse of authority.
 - We must not think that these accomplished this in a way that was necessarily blatant. They likely had their “religious” speak that justified what they were doing in some way.
 - 4.) ***Their use of prayer***
 - ***And for a pretense make long prayers*** – this word (Gk. prophasis) means false motive, pretend. It has the idea of something done which is a cover up for the true state of things. In this case, the men’s wickedness was covered up by long, eloquent prayers. They didn’t pray to God because they trusted in Him, looked to Him for help to live righteously, doing those things which were well pleasing to God. They only used this religious exercise as a cover up of what was really going on in their hearts.
 - ***In summary, religion was all about them.*** It was about their reputation, what others thought about them. It was about what they got out of it, what were the benefits to them by way of prosperity. It was about using religious language, teaching, and even prayer to cover up what they were in reality. And they were very good at it. They were so good that multitudes followed after them.
 - They had an orthodoxy of doctrine, but their life was unorthodox. The fruit of their lifestyle was enough to warn people of the rottenness of their religion.

APPLICATION

1.) A warning to the disciples of the Lord Jesus

- As we look at passages like this, we can tend to have an “us and them” attitude. We just give a “tsk, tsk”, shaking our heads, and view ourselves as the good guys who would never do such things. We want to be associated only with the “good guys”, and in doing so can miss the very warnings we should receive. But remember, it is primarily His disciples that He is addressing. He is saying “beware” because these same things can creep into our hearts.

- How can this manifest itself in our lives? The church can become like a social club to us. We can be tempted to do those things to just build ourselves a reputation. But someone may ask, "But doesn't God want us to have a good reputation?" I would say "yes." The Scriptures speak about us having a "good name" (see especially the Proverbs). But the difference here is that THIS is what religion is about for them. They are not doing things to please God and properly reflect His image, and rightly earn the esteem that is due to the righteous man or woman.
- A part of how they do this is by externalizing religion, and coming up with man made inventions of what spirituality is. They are especially trying to create an aura of "higher" spirituality.
- We also see that religion becomes what we can get from others, not what we can give. This is of course an extreme example in the scribes, but we can all move in that direction. How do others serve me, what will I benefit from these relationships.
- Even the use of the means of grace, like reading Scripture, praying, church attendance, praying in the prayer meeting, they become a cover up for an inwardly declining spirituality.
- We must fight these sinful tendencies by having a personal walk with God, and out of that serving others and using the means of grace just for that: a means of obtaining ongoing help in our relationship with God.

2.) To those who are not yet disciples

- He declares to the people in general, "this isn't what true spirituality is about." And this is what I say to you. There are those in the "Christian" world and within church, and perhaps within this church, who are like this. Who use spiritual language to cover up and excuse unchristian behavior. But this isn't Christianity, not the way Christ taught it.
- Beware of such false teachers. They existed in Jesus' day, and they exist in our day. They are on TV, they write books, they are on the Internet, they hold conferences. Their moral failures do not invalidate the truth of Christianity, but rather are a distortion of the truth, and are not that which Jesus established.
- Don't let such false teachers and Christians be a stumbling block to you. Look to the Lord Jesus. Look to Scripture. Look to believers who, though imperfectly, yet sincerely seek to know and please God.

3.) To those are marked by the characteristics of these scribes

- We are reminded that the mere knowledge and expertise in Scripture is no guarantee to keep from such error. It isn't the bare knowledge of the truth that identifies one as a Christian, but increasingly being conformed to that truth in the heart and flowing out into all of life. It is the greater knowledge of Scripture that makes one more culpable to his errors. He warns about those who are like these men that there will be a greater condemnation. It is God who sees the heart. It is God who is not fooled by these things.
- The good news is that there is good news. Even such sins can be repented of. Even those exposed in this condition can find grace and mercy in Christ. Then, things change. You will not want to use religion and Christianity, you will want to live in a new relationship with God and His people.