



**Kingdom Preparation**

*So Many Woes.*

Matthew 23:13-36

How to Prepare

Begin preparing by reading the full passage a few times. Then answer the questions for yourself. Then think about how your Small Group might answer them. Try re-wording the questions to fit you and your Small Group. Don't feel tied down to the discussion guide, just be sure to discuss the main point of the text in your conversations.

Resources-

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-live-the-unblessed-life>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/scribes-and-Pharisees.html>

Sermon Outline:

Matthew 23:13-36

1. Jesus Despises Hypocritical Faith. Vv. 13-36
2. Jesus Discloses Hypocritical Faith. Vv. 13-31
3. Jesus Denounces Hypocritical Faith. Vv. 32-36

**Matthew 23:13-36**

**Eight Woes**

13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.'

17 You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the

18 And, 'Whoever swears by the

altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.'

19 You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering?

20 Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it.

21 And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it.

22 And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

24 You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and

## Scripture (New American Standard Bible 1995)

self-indulgence.

26 You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

28 So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,

30 and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

31 So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

32 Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers.

33 You serpents, you brood of

vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?

34 "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,

35 so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

36 Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

# Discussion Questions

**Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 23:13-36.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Here is a question or two to help introduce the topic and jump-start discussion.

**1. What is something in life that often looks incredibly amazing, polished, or perfect on the outside (or on social media), but is actually messy, stressful, or a total disaster behind the scenes? What's the danger of always trying to show our lives as polished and perfect?**

## **UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION**

These questions should help your Small Group dig deeper into the text and then apply it to your lives today.

### **I. Jesus Despises Hypocritical Faith. Vv. 13-36**

**2. What is the tone of this passage, and what does the use and repetition of the words "woe", "blind", and "hypocrites" tell us about what God thinks about hypocrisy in our faith? How does recognizing that God isn't merely disappointed with inauthentic faith, but rather detests it, change the way we approach our prayer life and personal spiritual disciplines?**

**3. Hypocrisy essentially means "wearing a mask" or "acting." In our modern context, what are the most common "religious masks" we are tempted to put on to make others believe our faith is deeper than it actually is?**

**4. Why does Jesus fiercely condemn hypocritical faith, and how does this actually reveal His deep love for the people who were being led astray by these hypocritical leaders?**

### **II. Jesus Discloses Hypocritical Faith. Vv. 13-31**

**5. Which one of the woes stood out the most to you? Why is it necessary to confront hypocritical faith rather than ignore it?**

**6. Consider the "woes": Legalism (13), Misleading Others (14-15), Excusing Commitments (16-22), Biblical Imbalance/Missing the Point (23-24), Misrepresenting Holiness (25-28), and Prideful lack of Self-Awareness (29-31). What are some examples of ways we are guilty of these same things today?**

**7. Why is it better to look for areas of hypocrisy in our own lives through the lens of scripture and with a trusted friend, than to focus on examining everyone else's authenticity of faith? What should we do when we find hypocrisy in our own faith, or when we do happen to see it in a brother or sister?**

### **III. Jesus Denounces Hypocritical Faith. Vv. 32-36**

**8. Jesus uses incredibly severe language here, calling the hypocrites a "brood of vipers" and asking how they will escape condemnation (v. 33). How does this passage challenge the culturally popular idea that Jesus never judges and only affirms our choices?**

**9. What do these verses teach us about how unrepentant, hidden sin compounds over time? Why do you think a long-term refusal to be authentic with God eventually hardens a human heart to the point where it becomes almost impossible to repent?**

**10. When you consider the heavy spiritual reality of God's judgment on hypocrisy detailed in these verses, how does it heighten our need for the true, cleansing grace found only in the gospel? What is the hope that we have in turning from hypocritical, nominal faith to the saving arms of Jesus?**

**Matt. 23:13–36** Woes of Judgment against the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. Jesus now addresses the scribes and Pharisees directly, declaring a series of seven “woes” upon them that echoes the criticisms he has repeated throughout his ministry. These seven woes stand in contrast to the first seven “blessings” that introduce the Sermon on the Mount and describe Jesus’ true disciples (5:3–9). (For a similar list of woes, see Luke 11:37–54.)

**Matt. 23:13** First woe: the shut door. The woes are a mixture of condemnation, regret, and sorrow. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees are false leaders who have drawn the people away from the kingdom of heaven instead of toward it.

**Matt. 23:15** Second woe: entrapped converts. Jesus does not criticize proselytism per se, but the manner in which the Pharisees zealously sought converts, only to place them under the burdensome weight of the many requirements in their extrabiblical traditions. child of hell. Literally, “child of Gehenna,” a reference to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, just south of Jerusalem, where refuse was burned. Jewish and NT writings used it as a metaphorical picture of eternal punishment (see note on 18:6–9).

**Matt. 23:16–19** Third woe: binding oaths. The Pharisees distinguished between oaths made by the temple and those made by the gold of the temple, and between oaths made by the altar and those made by the gift on it. As in much of their belief system, they focus on misguided superficial distinctions and overlook the higher principles of the law.

**Matt. 23:20–22** whoever swears. Those with faith in God who recognize their constant accountability in his presence need only give a simple “yes” or “no” as a binding oath (see 5:23, 34–37).

**Matt. 23:23** Fourth woe: neglecting the weighty matters of the law. tithe. The Mosaic law required giving a tenth of all that one produced for the ongoing work of the Lord through the Levites and priests (e.g., Lev. 27:30–33). mint, dill, cumin. The Pharisees were so scrupulous in following this injunction that they paid a tithe even from their smallest garden crops. Jesus does not say that they were wrong in this (“These you ought to have done”), but that they should do this without neglecting the far more important matters.

**Matt. 23:24** straining out a gnat. The rabbis strained wine to remove even small, unclean insects (cf. Lev. 11:23, 41) that could contaminate it. swallowing a camel. The camel was the largest land animal in Palestine (cf. Matt. 19:24), also ceremonially unclean (Lev. 11:4). Jesus is speaking in obvious hyperbole (an intended overstatement to make a point). The

## Commentary (from ESV Study Bible)

Pharisees had become lost in the minute details, while neglecting the law's overarching intent.

**Matt. 23:26** Fifth woe: clean outside, filthy inside. clean the inside. While seeking external purity, the Pharisees were oblivious to the corrupt internal condition of their hearts.

**Matt. 23:27–28** Sixth woe: whitewashed tombs. The Pharisees were like tombs, which in Jesus' day could be outwardly very beautiful but within held nothing but death and decay. These tombs were customarily whitewashed to identify them clearly to passersby, since people would be rendered unclean for seven days through any contact with them (Num. 19:16; cf. Luke 11:44).

**Matt. 23:29–32** Seventh woe: descendants of murderers of the prophets. In scheming to have Jesus executed, the religious leaders show that they are following in the footsteps of their ancestors, who had persecuted and murdered God's prophets.

**Matt. 23:29** tombs . . . monuments. Funerary art became rich and varied around this time, with widespread ornamentation of tomb facades, ossuaries, and stone coffins, as well as wall paintings and graffiti.

**Matt. 23:33** serpents . . . brood of vipers. Virtually synonymous terms that magnify the guilt of these religious leaders (see notes on 3:7; 12:33–35).

**Matt. 23:35** The interval from the blood of righteous Abel (Gen. 4:8–11) to the blood of Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20–22) encompasses all of OT biblical history. Abel was the first person murdered in the OT and Zechariah is the last murdered, since 2 Chronicles (where the murder of Zechariah is recorded) is the last book in the Hebrew canon (see 2 Chron. 24:20–22). There is a difficulty with the phrase son of Barachiah, however, since in 2 Chron. 24:20 Zechariah is called the "son of Jehoiada," while the more famous prophet who wrote the book of Zechariah is "Zechariah the son of Berechiah" (Zech. 1:1). Several solutions have been proposed: (1) Just as Zechariah the prophet can be called either "the son of Berechiah" (Zech. 1:1) or "the son of Iddo" (Ezra 6:14; Iddo was his grandfather), so the Zechariah in 2 Chron. 24:20 could have been the son of an otherwise unrecorded "Barachiah," with "Jehoiada" (who lived 130 years; 2 Chron. 24:15) being Zechariah's grandfather. (2) As was the case with a number of people in the OT, the father of Zechariah mentioned in 2 Chron. 24:20 could have been known by more than one name—i.e., Jehoiada and Barachiah. (3) The reference may not be to the Zechariah in 2 Chron. 24:20–22 but to Zechariah the prophet, as is suggested by some extrabiblical Jewish literature that includes a tradition telling about the murder of Zechariah the

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prophet (who comes near the end of the OT prophets). (4) The phrase “son of Barachiah” may have been a very early textual addition by a scribe who thought “Zechariah the son of Barachiah” was intended (one significant early manuscript, Sinaiticus, in fact, omits the words “the son of Barachiah”). Each of these proposed solutions presents a plausible possibility, though there is not enough information to determine which is most likely.

**Matt. 23:36** Rather than respond to the unique opportunity they had to receive their Messiah and participate in the kingdom of heaven, the religious people of this generation would continue to spill righteous blood—now that of Jesus and his followers—and so face God’s wrath.