

# Matthew 23: Pharisaical Hindrances to Revival

by Richard Owen Roberts

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*The sermon explores the hindrances to revival in our lives, particularly the traits of the Pharisees, and calls for personal reflection and prayerful action.*

**Duration:** 2:01:15

**Scripture:** Genesis 29:10-11, Matthew 23:1-12

**Topics:** "Revival"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the problems and challenges faced by believers as a result of the influence of the Philistines. He emphasizes the need for individuals to take responsibility and consider what they can do to address these issues. The speaker also highlights the importance of leaders who are willing to lead by example and not burden others with tasks they are unwilling to do themselves. He references Matthew 23 in the Bible to illustrate the hypocrisy of some churches and the need for the Holy Spirit to work outside the constraints of traditional church structures.

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## Transcript

The psalmist writes in Psalm 24, The earth is the Lord's and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it. For he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord and who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and is not sworn deceitfully, he shall receive a blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

This is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, even Jacob. Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O gates, and lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts. He is the King of glory.

I cannot imagine anything on earth more precious than the nearness of Christ. I have been indicating to you that there are two wonderful, wonderful things that always happen in genuine revival. Christ draws near to his people, and the word of God spreads like a tidal wave of blessing.

I don't know how others respond to that, but I like that. I believe that's exactly what we need in our personal lives, in society, and certainly in all the churches. And isn't God gracious to have preserved for us so many of the accounts of his doing precisely that, drawing near, causing his word to rush like a flood? One of my favorite accounts is an account of something that happened in the Principality of Wales.

For those who haven't been before, I've justified my frequent mention of Wales by simply saying that's where my family came from. And so I have greater retention of details about Wales than, say, Ireland or Sweden. But anyway, in one of the northern valleys, now some have been to Wales, and perhaps some of you don't know, that it's really very mountainous, especially in the north.

In fact, people train for alpine climbing in northern Wales all the time, although the mountains are not nearly as high. They are truly rugged. At any rate, one of the great preachers was preaching in a field, and a great crowd had gathered, but suddenly, in the midst of his sermon, he dropped his head for a moment, and then he looked up, and he said, What if you were to organize the pilgrim prayer meeting? What if you were to go from house to house to house, starting on one side of the valley and working up and coming on down the other side? What if you went to every house, knocked at the door, and when the door was opened, asked, Can we come in? And when the homeowner said, Come in, for what reason? To pray.

To pray? You want to come into my home to pray? Yes. My. Isn't that something? Well, yes.

Come in. And what if every home you entered, you prayed, Lord, send your salvation to this household. And then the preacher said, I dare to say, before you have gone halfway through the valley, God will come.

Among those who were present that day was an elderly, poor, and not very good woman. Very bad reputation in the community. But she took to heart that notion of a prayer meeting and coming to her home.

And so she went straight to her modest dwelling after service and began cleaning and making ready for the prayer meeting. She went to work and stayed at it until dark. She went to bed in the dark, rose early as soon as the light permitted, and began again.

And when the local store opened, she went, taking all the money in her possession, and purchased two wax candles so that there would be light when the pilgrim prayer meeting came. And worked the rest of the day in finishing her preparations. But nobody came that day, nor the next.

Indeed, not even the next week or the next month. And after an entire year, and no one had come, back in that shop where she had purchased the candles in her own very diffident way, she tried to talk to the shopkeeper. Get out with it, woman! What is it? Well, I'm wanting to ask, when will the prayer meeting come to my house? Prayer meeting? Woman, are you completely out of your mind? Well, she said, when the great preacher was here, he said a pilgrim prayer meeting would go to every home.

Oh, woman, that shows how dumb you are. Nobody pays any attention to the preacher. And she went home crushed.

For years, she had had a single ray of hope. Lit in that meeting. And now, it was gone.

But in the providence of God, the shopkeeper went to chapel that night and reported the incident. And right then and there, they organized the pilgrim prayer meeting. And they began, on one side of the valley,

knocking.

Can we come in? Yes? Oh, God, send your salvation to this household. And before they had gone halfway up the valley, God came. And one of those glorious revivals of North Wales occurred.

Does your own spirit respond by saying, do it again, Lord? Do it again. But in most records of revival, it doesn't take a great deal of difficulty to find that it cost somebody something. Organizing and pursuing pilgrim prayer meetings is hardly an everyday event.

I expect some of you come from localities where something very much like that could occur. I told that story some time ago in a valley in western Massachusetts. And the people were stirred and moved.

And they organized the pilgrim prayer meeting. And they began going from home to home. And then the church started to fill up.

And conversions were taking place. Then Satan, apparently, in great anger, somehow brought, or Christ allowed, who am I to say how it happened? But a great many of the people took very ill. And the prayer meeting was discontinued and what looked very hopeful kind of sputtered out.

But I want to ask you this morning, are you doing what you can? Now we all agree that we don't produce revival. No matter how many prominent figures of the past or the present have tried to make it sound as if we can make revival happen, that's nonsense. God does as He pleases.

But, wonderfully, God does please to draw near to those who draw near to Him. And He does please to answer the prayer of those who truly pray. No, Lord, here we are.

We've been together the days of this week. We have looked at sobering passages from Your Word. We have felt challenged.

We have seen responsibility. We have experienced a measure of conviction. But being who we are and what we are, we are very able at being stirred and moved and helped and then turning right back to where we were.

And unless Your grace solidifies matters in our hearts and puts a whole new persevering spirit within us so we will not let go and will not leave unfinished that which You have begun this week together may prove to be of little consequence. Oh, God, in Your wondrous mercy and grace, grant that it shall not be in any way a lost week, but the beginnings of a wonderful fresh season of grace and mercy of Your nearness, of the flow of Your Word for each of us and multitudes of others. Help us as we turn to Your book now.

Give us a fresh ability to pay enormous attention to what You say. Give us those two gracious and wonderful gifts of repentance and faith so that Your very will will be accomplished, we pray, in the name of our strong and mighty Savior. Amen.

We'll be looking at two passages this morning if I'm able to pursue what I believe God has put upon my heart. And I like the way Dr. Schneider has led us in the afternoons in the notion of a break. I always think it's a good idea because we are so human and it does us good to get up and move and tend to business, but I always forget.

But will you be here all morning? Will you remind me I promised a break if I fail? Thank you. We have two passages, so it will be easy to know when the break should be called for. And she won't fail, I know that.

But if you want to chip in with her, go ahead. All right. The first of these passages, it might seem like an odd passage for an occasion like this, but indeed I think it's ideally suited for this morning.

The Gospel of Matthew at chapter 23. The Gospel of Matthew at chapter 23. Now, not a very pleasant chapter.

A chapter describing some people we like to throw mental stones at. Have you ever observed that when somebody treats you meanly and unjustly, your first reaction is very noble and spiritual. But then in time, you find yourself acting as nasty as they were.

I know it's a hard thing to face, but I've had a wee bit of difficulty in my life. People that haven't liked me and the things I've said, and I've been so noble and good in responding to their false accusations. And then later have been very distressed to find myself thinking as nastily about them as they appeared to think about me.

Well, here's a chapter aimed at the scribes and the Pharisees. Did you ever have a good and a pleasant thought about the scribes and the Pharisees? When you hear those words, oh, what delightful men they were. I wish I could have known them.

My, my, my, what a privilege it would have been to have known these men. I don't think you... Well, I... Of course, I don't know. Maybe you're unbalanced mentally.

And maybe you never had that kind of a reaction, but I rather expect none of us to feel very good about what we know about scribes and Pharisees. Now, in this chapter, I would like to single out 15 matters about the Pharisees and scribes that Christ pinpoints. Not because I think it will do any good to throw stones at them, but because I fear there may be a whole lot more of the scribe and the Pharisee in us than we've ever honestly acknowledged.

And as I said already this morning and certainly often enough prior to today, none of us is so absurd as to think we can make revival happen, but it would be just as absurd to suppose that we could never in any way be a hindrance to revival. And so what I'm really hoping is that we will each have a heart-searching time this morning to see if any of these Pharisee-like traits mark us and have not yet been brought under the grace of Christ and purged from our lives. But again, I don't want anybody to get the wrong notion.

I'm not in any way implying we can make revival happen, but we can, by the help of the Word and the Spirit, eliminate hindrances from our own personal lives, from the church of which we're a part, from all our contact and relationship, and this indeed could be classified along with that Luke 3 passage we studied this week and along with the James 4 passage we looked at and along with the psalm that Anthony read from this morning, who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord. There is heart preparation that must be made and must be maintained. I bet you've found things like I have.

God has done a thorough work of cleansing in your life and you breathe something of a sigh of relief and of thanksgiving that you were better, by God's grace, than you were and then suddenly you realize some of these nasty things have crept back in and you're not nearly as clean before the Lord as you ought to be. Well, let's take this chapter and look at it carefully and tenderly. Do you think Christ hated the scribes and the Pharisees or mourned over them? Now, there are three parts in the chapter.

The first is really a series, by my numbering technique at least, of seven statements, summary statements, about them. That would be chapter 23 of Matthew verses 1 to 7. Then there are five verses, verses 8 to

12, of warning to us and then that is followed from verse 13 to the end of the chapter with Christ's woes upon the Pharisees. I am personally convinced that God does not delight in woes.

I don't believe our Savior ever took any pleasure in condemning anyone. Holiness of being forced Him to do so, but not pleasure in the delight of the suffering and destruction of the wicked. So it would be totally inappropriate for any of us to take any pleasure at all in the woes and I believe indeed we would be making a dramatic mistake not to keep such an open mind and heart so that God could speak to us through the failures of others.

Now we're not very good at that ordinarily. As I said already, when someone sins against us we compose ourselves with a nice, gracious spirit, but before long we're thinking ill of them. But let us earnestly, personally, ask God to so manage our thoughts and reactions this morning that every one of these fifteen things that ought to hit us between the eyes will do so.

And everyone that ought to provoke a deep spirit of repentance within us will be successful. And in every case where the scribes and Pharisees failed, God will enable us to succeed. So as I said, three parts.

First, verses one to seven, a pinpointing of the Pharisees' problems. Let's read it together. Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses.

Therefore, all that they tell you do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds. For they say things and do not do them. And they tie up heavy loads and lay them on men's shoulders.

But they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men. For they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.

And they love the places of honor at banquets and the chief seats of the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces and being called by men, Rabbi. So let's take them just in the order Christ gives them. And let's weigh them from a personal perspective and ask God whether in any measure at all we stand guilty with the Pharisees and the scribes of these grievous sins.

Jesus starts in verse 2 with their seizing positions of authority and prominence. He says the scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses. The emphasis is not upon the fact that someone sits in the seat of Moses but that they put themselves there.

That position is very important to them. Now I doubt that this is the great plague upon this body of believers. I haven't seen anybody jostling for position.

But that doesn't mean there isn't some secret hidden sin here. You may never knock anybody down and stand on them to be taller. But you could wish that you were taller.

And you could even imagine in your own minds ways in which they could be brought down so that you could be elevated. So I don't think it would be quite fair to only look at the literal and to say, oh well, I'm not guilty of that. No, not me.

For after all, the greatest sins are not the sins of the body but the sins of the heart. And we may have learned how to hide our sins by conduct that is reasonably correct and yet never have learned how to deal with the inner man and the desires that are so inappropriate to the plan and the purpose of God. So be

honest.

Is there any inward longing for position and authority? Well, I have known a great deal of this. I have literally seen men clamoring for position and abusing others to get there. An awful lot of the tail bearing that goes on in the church is not simple ignorance but self-elevation.

If we can manage to make everybody else look stupid and absurd, then we can shine more brightly. As I said, we're not concerned this morning about throwing stones at anybody but of being sure, by God's grace, that the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us of all sin. Well, that's number one.

Look, if you will, at number two. Our Lord is not mincing words. He's not avoiding hard issues.

He's hitting things face on. Verse three. He makes it clear that they are vile hypocrites saying things and not doing them.

Therefore, says Christ, all they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds. Now, I must be especially direct and plain to persons like myself, those of us who stand in front of others and preach and teach. We're the ones in the greatest danger.

Not exclusively the ones in danger but the greatest danger. I observe the same essential thing happening with parents and their children. Parents will forbid children certain things, command their children certain things.

And the things they forbid, they do themselves. And I've known of a good many instances where a child responds, say, to his father and says, Dad, you do the very thing. I'm very sad to tell you my own children have said that to me when I've given them a good sound rebuke for doing the wrong thing and it was clearly wrong.

And then they made it clear, well, we've seen you do that, Dad. In fact, at one time, I was so oppressed by that and even just the thought of it to say nothing of the actual fact occurring. And I said to my kids one day, my word, can you not find at least one good thing about your father and imitate that instead of all of his faults? Do you ever feel that way as a parent? But this is a mighty serious thing, isn't it? Putting burdens on others that you do not bear yourself.

Rebuking people for sins and yet perhaps secretly, if not openly, practicing those sins yourself. It is not my intention to try and bring you under conviction, but only to convey what our Savior says here. And if indeed these things fit you, then to hope and pray that by God's grace, you will go carefully through your life and reorder it according to the plan and the purpose of Christ.

And the root of all of this second issue is insensitivity and hypocrisy. So that's what we're really dealing with. Insensitivity.

Is there any of that in your behavior? Either as an individual or as a leader. Whole churches can be guilty of this very thing. Laying immense burdens on others and yet not shouldering those burdens themselves.

Well, let's move to verse 4. I told you that our Savior introduces at least seven specific things. In verse 4, they tie heavy loads and they lay them on men's shoulders. But they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.

Now, the second, verse 2, or verse 3 rather, was specifically addressed to giving orders and commands. And this third matter is focused upon burdens, loads. Now, some of you have worked somewhere where you have been assigned all the dirty work.

And your boss never even soils his fingers. Any of us who have been employed by others have found what a lovely thing it is to work with someone who never gives an order that he's not willing to care for himself. Obviously, prudence sometimes makes it necessary for the boss to assign a task to you and not do it himself, because if he did it all, he wouldn't do what he was hired to do.

So Christ is not casting aspersions upon that which is sensible and right, but upon that which is indeed godless, insensitivity, hypocrisy, giving orders and laying burdens on others that you will not shoulder. So again, has the Holy Spirit anything to say to you personally on that particular matter? And our Lord moves on with great tenderness and care. Verse 5. They do all their deeds to be noticed by men, for they broaden their phylacteries and they lengthen the tassels of their garment.

In other words, they are the center of their own lives. Now this is a delicate subject. As you know, I have been around quite a spell and preaching steadily for more years than most of you have lived.

Many years back, a man came to me and he made an accusation against me that wounded me very deeply. When he came, he said, I believe this is the hardest undertaking I have ever managed. But he said, I am compelled to come and tell you that you are two different men.

I couldn't imagine what he was talking about. He said, I have listened to you in a large packed public auditorium. I have listened to you in a small room with a handful of people.

You are two different men. In a large gathering, you are electrifying. Your impact is huge.

In a little room, half full, you act angry, disgusted. Well, I said, that's your nonsense. Well, he said, I told you how hard it was for me to come.

I hoped that you would at least consider what I said. I would consider it if it made sense, but it's silly. And when he left in discouragement, I said, Lord, it is silly, isn't it? But the Lord didn't find it silly.

Indeed, the Lord enabled me to see that it was exactly true. If the crowd was large and growing, I was thinking, man, I must have been good yesterday. If it was shrinking, I wonder what dumb thing I did yesterday.

What I discovered was I was at the very center of what I was doing. I didn't want to be there. That's just where I was.

And is not the Holy Spirit speaking directly to your heart and asking, is it possible that you are at the center of what you're doing? That when everything is said and done, it's the approval, the applause of others that is of very great importance to you. Again, I'm not accusing you, my word. How would I dare when a good man had to accuse me to my face, and I was so blind to the issues that I denied and sent him away in sorrow.

And it wasn't until the Holy Spirit broke through my hard heart that I saw the accuracy of what he said. And of course, when I saw the accuracy, I was deeply wounded within. I didn't start out with that in mind to become the center of my ministry.

I really did have a passion for Christ and holiness. But somehow in the course of things, that passion turned inward. So what about you? Again, we're not asking for public response, just honesty with God.

Is this Pharisee-like tendency in you? We don't know anything really experientially about phylacteries or about robes with tassels. That would hardly be something that would matter here. But we do know an awful lot about pride, about longing for recognition and position, about being regarded by others as very superior to the masses.

And think of the church splits that occur on this basis alone. And think of the roaming Christians who are never satisfied anywhere. And they go from church to church casting stones at every place they've been.

They come afresh to your church and you think how fortunate you are to have these people. And before any time at all they're throwing stones at you. I had the group.

You know, I'll just back up a moment. I haven't spent my life as a pastor, but I did some work in that direction. And we had this wonderful group come at one time all at once, about a dozen people.

And we felt so blessed to get that nice shot in the arm, this group that strengthened us. And it wasn't but weeks before they were throwing stones at me like they had thrown them at the church they left. Well, I'm not going to prolong it.

But I'm hoping the Holy Spirit will help you to search your heart with honesty. And let's say that in these matters we've looked at thus far, numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, the Holy Spirit has given you a star on each of the four. What then? Well, why not make the covenant with God that you won't sink back in doing things that God has graciously delivered you from? Well, look at the title of these accusations that our Savior makes against scribes and Pharisees.

Verse 6, They love the places of honor at banquets, and they love the chief seats in the synagogue. Being elevated is very, very important to them. You remember that story Christ told of the one who took the low place in the banquet hall, and then the host called him up to the chief seat.

What's the difference between being elevated by others and elevating yourself? I've known men who could not exist without office. I was in a situation at one time where time after time after time, this was an elder-led church, time after time after time, this man declared his eligibility as an elder. For years I had known him and felt he was not eligible, but he kept clamoring.

And then finally he was elevated to the eldership, and it was only weeks before he had stirred up a great mess in everything. I was one time pastor of a church start, and by the Constitution we had seven elders, and then for every 50 new members another elder added. We had seven godly good men, and for about three years there was never a moment of disharmony.

But the church was growing, and we had more than 100 new people, and so by the Constitution we had to add two new elders. Now deep in my heart I knew we didn't have two new elder-worthy men. I knew, had I said, let's cross that part of the Constitution out for now, everybody would have agreed with me.

That would have been the right thing to do. But I let them push through the election of two new men unfit for office, and that church never had a peaceful moment thereafter. Our Lord knew what He was talking about.

Those who clamor for position, and those who are unwise enough to let the clamor get what He wants. Number six. Again, very plain and direct.

They love respectful greetings in the marketplace. Verse seven. They can't live without being respected by others.

Do you think Christ suffered that problem? Is it not glorious that Christ's total liberation from the need of honor from men is what enabled Him to go all the way to the cross and to purchase our salvation? Oh, that we would imitate our Savior instead of others. But is it possible that someone here has been or will be troubled by the need of respect and honor? And then number seven. They distinguish themselves by titles.

Look at verse seven. They loved being called rabbi by men. Now, I want you to think of a matter that is very real in our day.

Now, suppose, and may I speak to you directly, sir, suppose that you were a judge in a court of law and you and I became acquainted and I had reason to write to you and I said to the honorable and gave you a name. Would that be inappropriate if you were a judge? Not at all inappropriate because that is the title of honor that does respectfully apply to the judge. Or if someone of you wanted to write me a letter, I hope it won't include these words, but if you wrote to the Reverend Mr. Roberts, you wouldn't be out of order.

I don't like the term. I never use it, but it would at least be suitable because ordained ministers have been given the title reverend. I think it's silly.

I don't like it one bit, but nonetheless it is legitimate. But suppose I stepped up to this brother here and I said to him, I am the Reverend Mr. Roberts. Would that be appropriate? It would be dreadfully wrong.

Some of these titles are acceptable when given us by others if they fit, but to use these titles ourselves is indeed a grievous breach of ordinary ethics. But our Savior is making it a bigger problem than a breach of ethics. He's talking about men who have got to be recognized by their titles.

The doctors, the reverends, the Honorable Mr. I mean, imagine a judge signing his letter to you, the Honorable Judge Jones. Some are dumb enough to do that, but it's a great breach. I get so disgusted when I get letters from pastors saying, Dear Reverend so-and-so.

I, in first inclination, just want to dump them in the wastebasket. What do I want to do with a man so stupid that he calls himself by a title of honor? I usually have more grace than that. I'm just telling you how I would like to respond.

I trust never do. But we're not really concerned about those that aren't here. But are any of you requiring that type of recognition, that title? And again, I'm hoping that the Holy Spirit will use this passage to help you to resist that sort of thing at all times.

Why must Christians have titles? I'm not speaking against titles. I'm just speaking against the need of them and the clamoring for them. Now, as I said, there were seven verses outlining in specifics these Pharisees.

But now we have five verses directed to us, the readers. Verses 8 through 12. But do not be called rabbi, for one is your teacher, and you are all brothers.

And do not call anyone on earth your father, for one is your father, he who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders, for one is your leader, that is Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant, and whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

You see, what our Lord does is to personalize to our benefit the great subject that he has been dealing with in terms of the Pharisee. True humility. And it's a very reasonable thing that he does.

Why should you call me rabbi when there is a great rabbi? Why should we clamor to be called teacher when there is one truly great teacher? So, the issue in all of this is genuine humility. And that's what it comes right down to. And so, dear friends, on this morning occasion in a conference on revival, it is perfectly plain that the greatest problem of the scribes and Pharisees was pride.

And it's the greatest problem in today's church. And it's that which absolutely guarantees revival can't happen. I hardly need to spell it out to you again.

God holds at arm's length the proud in heart. And revival is God refusing to hold anyone at arm's length but drawing near. So it is utterly impossible to conceive of proud people being revived.

And so the vast duty upon each of us to humble ourselves before the Lord. And what we have been taught in these first seven verses and what is reiterated in a fresh and provocative way in these next five verses is at the very heart of the issue of revival. And it's hardly necessary for me to say that in 2 Chronicles 7.14 where our dear Lord has provided us some help in knowing our part of preparing for revival.

If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves. And what's the sense of talking about the rest if the first step has not been taken. And who would dare to say as I earlier in the week commented that they had humbled themselves sufficiently.

But most of us have some notion at least of how well we're doing in humility. And then God has very amazing ways of bringing things into focus. I have a packet an envelope one of these manila envelopes in my office the contents of which has never been read.

And I'm going to tell you why. When it came in the mail I didn't see anything on the outside that indicated where it really came from. It had an address but it didn't ring any bell.

And so I opened it and I pulled out this packet of material. It was sent by the largest protestant denomination in the nation. And it was devoted to the subject of the solemn assembly.

I sat down and began to glance through this packet with one purpose in mind. To see if they had recognized where they learned about the solemn assembly. Now it was an absolute fact that they learned about it from me.

But there I am searching through this literature to see if they gave name recognition. Suddenly it dawned on me what I was doing. I was so thoroughly ashamed and disgusted with myself that I stuffed the stuff back in the envelope and never ever read it.

But not too long ago we thought we were going to move and I was sorting stuff in my office and up came this packet and I didn't recognize it and I pulled it out. Oh no! Not that! And back in the envelope it went. When we think we have made some progress in humility, the Lord has very excellent ways of bringing us to our senses.

But surely at the very heart of this chapter is this issue of pride and humility. Now let's move to the third section of the chapter. The section beginning with verse 13.

Our Savior's woes to the Pharisee. There are eight of them in number. If you don't trust my counting, count for yourself.

Let me pinpoint them first. By reading the section and just simply stressing the woes. Verse 13, woe number one.

But woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men. For you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Number two.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses even while for a pretense you make long prayers. Therefore you shall receive greater condemnation. Number three.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourself. Number four. Woe to you blind guides who say, whoever swears by the temple that is nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged.

You fools and blind men. Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And whoever swears by the altar that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering, he is obliged. You blind men.

Which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore he who swears swears both on the altar and by everything on it, and he who swears by the temple swears both by the temple and by him who dwells within it. And he who swears by heaven swears both by the name of God and by him who sits upon it. Number five.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites who you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law, justice and peace and mercy and faithfulness. But these are the things that you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.

Number six. 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 self-indulgence. You blind Pharisees first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish so that the outside may become clean also.

Number seven. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites for you're like white-washed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful but inside they're full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men but inwardly you're full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Number eight.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you build the tombs of the prophets and you adorn the monuments of the righteous 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 consequently you bear witness against yourself for you are sons of those who murdered the prophets fill up the measure of the guilt of your fathers. Now this is obviously a very weighty passage and all that each of us before the Lord might know that in no way are we like these Pharisees scribes and hypocrites honestly I think that all of us have been

so blighted by sin in the past that we cannot dare presume that in all the days of the future we will not lapse into some of these grievous things and so at least from time to time we should go back over lists of this sort and be absolutely sure that we're not in any way tainted by these things for every one of us is capable of being Pharisee-like scribe-like hypocritical as all of these men were. Let's take not a long time but just sufficient time to feel deeply what our Savior is pronouncing woe concerning shutting up the kingdom of heaven against man.

Now those of us in the Reformed camp run some danger here. We could make things more difficult and impossible for others than God himself does. I don't wish to pursue this I don't wish to make a big matter of it but whenever we do anything that makes the kingdom of God either more easily accessible or more difficult to enter we have violated the Lord.

Our task is to speak precisely what the Lord himself said. These Pharisees were no good at that. They were extremely clever at making laws that contradicted the Scripture than interpreting the Scripture to fit their contradictions.

So I'm asking you to heed the words of our Lord. Don't you fall into the simply outrageous habits of the scribes and the Pharisees. The ninth in the total is the second of the woes.

You devour widows' houses even while for a pretense you make long prayers. Therefore you shall receive greater condemnation. Now I doubt that anyone here is guilty of putting a widow out of her house and appropriating to himself all that was rightfully hers.

But we don't have to be guilty of the exact illustration that Christ gives to be guilty of covering evil deeds with a sanctimonious outward appearance. And most of you have, like myself, been in prayer meetings where certain people pray in public these long and even ornate prayers, but it never seems to come from the heart, though it's not ours to finally say. But it does seem to be a cloak of righteousness over an evil life.

As I've said, I haven't spent a large portion of my life in pastoral ministry. But I was in this church that had had unitarian leanings for years. And there was a mighty work of God and we did pass through a lengthy season of radical conversions week after week after week.

I was single, I was pouring my heart and soul into it. We had at that time in attendance the man who managed one of the rental car agencies for that entire district. And he came to me one day and he said, Mr. Roberts, I've got a number of very nice vehicles that need to be moved from Portland, Oregon to Los Angeles.

We can't rent them in Portland during the winter, they're convertibles. You look awfully tired to me and the people tell me how hard you work. I would like to give you a credit card and the keys and I would like you to drive one of these beautiful cars to Los Angeles.

You can use the credit card for gas, for food, for hotels. He said if I had to have a truck down there, it would cost me far more than you will spend. And would you do me a favor and take a vacation? Well, it was very appealing and I accepted it.

But the concern I had was what about the midweek meeting? It was growing, it was becoming vital with these new converts. Well, we'd had a lawyer convert at a perfectly glorious conversion and immediately he had taken hold of the word and was just pushing forward with immense strength and speed. And so I

thought, well, why not have him give the Bible lesson? And there was another man looking very hopeful.

Why not have him lead the prayer portion? And the third man, who was indeed very capable of leading the music. And then the fourth man, one of these that devours widow's houses. So he was given no assignment.

When I came back on the Saturday, I was told my friend, the lawyer, was in the hospital dying. I went straight to the hospital. He was barely alive, just alive enough to explain what had happened.

The fourth man, given no position, had pushed the others aside and taken over the whole meeting and completely ruined the occasion for everybody but himself. And the man assigned to teach had a heart attack right in the church meeting. And within very few days was in glory.

I think that's what our Savior is talking about. Men who are totally unfit but who don't mind who gets hurt and what damage is done as long as they get what they want. Number three, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, you travel about on sea and land, you make a proselyte and your proselyte is even worse than you are.

Now listen, one of the curses upon the American church are the millions of people who are called converts, who are as unsaved as Satan himself. And made converts by men who are so Pharisee-like that it's a wonder they have survived even three minutes in the ministry. Our nation is under the curse of scribes and Pharisee.

And I hope, by God's grace, that none of you will ever, ever, at any time, be guilty of making converts who are truly children of the devil. Our Lord moves on in verses 16 to 22 to talk about blind guides. Those who swear by the temple and all of those verses there from 16 to 22.

In other words, men who are so ridiculous in their thinking that they make all kinds of idiotic conclusions. Now that's part of the curse of the land. Are you not yourself shocked at the absolute stupidity of our leaders? Throughout all of history, it has been proven that immoral leadership leads to the destruction of a nation.

And we go on electing immoral men. And the only thing that decides the issue is whether they are part of our party. We would rather have an absolute reprobate totally committed to the destruction of everything righteous if he's in our party than a good man if he's in somebody else's party.

We are not only in society, but in the church behaving ourselves as idiotically as these scribes and these Pharisees. And we must ask, am I acting as foolishly, as unwisely, as ridiculously as these men? And then we have the statement in verse 23 about tithing mint and dill and coming and neglecting the weight here matters of the law. I know a lot of churches that have all kinds of rules and regulations, rules deciding how long a woman's blouse sleeve must be, how long the length of her skirt, whether someone can wear jewelry or not.

Just rule after rule after rule after rule and at the very core of everything is evil. Nothing godly at all, just all outward nonsense. Elders, deacons, pastors, ungodly men quite capable of issuing rules to others, but incapable of living the glorious gospel of Christ themselves.

And if you in those categories now, or are you in danger of running in that direction in the future. Verse 25, you clean the outside of the cup, but the inside is filthy. There is far too much outward religion and far too

little inward holiness.

Then, verses 29 to 31. I know men in ministry today who honor men like George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards and the great men of the past that God has used greatly, but they themselves wouldn't lift a single finger to be like those men. Indeed, if it came down to it, they would be glad to put them in the grave, if they were living today and superseding their foolish notions.

Well, these are all big matters. I'm determined to get to a second passage, and I promised our friend here with permission to remind me of the break, and we're going to do that, and she's not going to let me forget, but I am burdened this morning that by the time we leave here, by God's grace, we will be ready for any blessing God sends. And this chapter is wonderfully helpful, and the thing I'm really urging, that having laid it in front of you this morning, you will now go back time after time after time to be sure that you have done everything appropriate in terms of what Christ laid before us.

And just to end this session, look at verse 33. You hypocrites, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell? And that was preceded by these very sobering words in verse 32. Fill up then the measure of the guilt of your fathers.

Dear friends, Christ is not suggesting that these scribes and Pharisees repent. He's not holding out to them a ray of hope. After he gets through denouncing them with his woes, he tells them, just go ahead now, fill up the measure of your iniquity.

I know you're not going to change. I know you love the traditions of men more than the commandments of God. I'm not going to waste any pity or extend any false hope.

So go ahead, fill up the measure of your sin and come under the wrath of God to the utmost. And just in case you've never made the connection, in 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul speaks very specifically about filling up the measure of sin and coming under the wrath of God to the utmost. But here's the beautiful thing.

While Christ was not holding out hope to the Pharisees, he is showing us what we can do to make ready the way of the Lord. And how we can live day after day throughout our future as men and women whom God can draw near to and through whom can flow in a mighty flood the word of the Lord. Grant, Lord, that for each of us nothing will hinder but that we shall be men and women to whom you do draw near and through whom your gospel runs as a mighty flood for Christ's glory.

Amen. Now, Lord, we are all aware that it is dangerous that we might reach a saturation point and when there's an overload of helpful information and we might just miss what you're saying to us. So we pray that in these last moments of the morning that you'll give us each a fresh ability to focus and to take to heart what you say to us for Jesus Christ's glory.

Amen. I'd like to call your attention to a passage that could never be genuinely described as a revival passage but is very, very helpful when looked at from this perspective. So will you turn to the book of Genesis and I'd like to call your attention to a portion of chapter 28.

The book of Genesis and the portion of chapter 28. Now, if you don't find it in 28, as I didn't, you might try 26. Just a brief part.

Genesis 26 and we'll pick it up at verse 12. Now Isaac sowed in that land and he reaped in the same year a hundred fold and the Lord blessed him. And the man became rich and he continued to grow richer until

he became wealthy.

For he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household so that the Philistines envied him. Now all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham's fathers, the Philistines stopped up by filling them with earth. Then Abimelech said to Isaac, go away from us for you're too powerful for us.

And Isaac departed from there and he camped in the valley of Jerar and he settled there. Then Isaac dug again the wells which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names of his fathers or he gave them the names which his fathers had given them.

But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of flowing water, the herdsmen Jerar quarreled and the herdsmen of Isaac saying the water is ours. So he named the well Esek because they contended with him, etc. Now as I said, it's not a passage really dealing with revival.

But a long long time ago I had the privilege of knowing slightly Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones of London. Someone at one point gave me a group of audio tapes, you know the old fashion cassettes I think we used to call them, of 12 sermons that Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones had preached in Westminster Chapel, London in commemoration of the revival of 1858-59. So they were sermons preached in 1958-59 and I just had great delight listening to them and now those sermons are available in the book some of you may have read the book Revival by Martin Lloyd Jones and it's well worth reading.

But one of his sermons was based upon this Genesis 26 passage and as I said it's not really on the subject revival but using your imagination and as I've told you already this week, I honestly believe a sanctified imagination can be wonderfully used of God and so I would never dare to urge anyone to stop imagining things. We have to put controls on our imagination so they don't take us in the wrong direction. But here is a picture of Isaac growing in great wealth, being so strong and influential that he's being asked to leave the area but finding it necessary to re-dig the wells that his father had dug.

Because the wells, so to speak were filled with Philistine junk. So it's more a picture that I'm commending to you than a passage that could be legitimately pushed hard for the subject of revival but it is very picturesque. Can you not imagine a perfectly splendid well with glorious water, ice cold, lovely in taste, thoroughly refreshing, enjoyed over a season of years and then filled with junk.

I don't know how to picture the church any better than that. Oh, the way the church used to lead the nation. The influence of the church.

Now it would be absurd to think that there was no evil in past centuries and decades. Man has always been evil but evil was committed under the cover of darkness and behind closed doors because people were afraid to be known for what they really were. I've shared with some an incident in my own life.

I had been as a college student preaching in a Methodist church where they had not had any gospel preaching for a long time and there was a woman in the church, her husband owned the largest car dealership in the county and she hated me and my preaching. She went to the church her husband did not but she went all around that area denouncing me saying that the Methodist superintendent had made a wicked mistake in putting some young kid in the pulpit preaching and he was terrible. Nobody should go to hear him and many came just to see if I was as bad as she said.

And then one day this woman came just in a flood of tears crying, you've got to help me you've got to help me and I said would you please leave me alone don't bother me go on, go away and she kept pleading help me, help me help me, help me I said I don't have time to waste on people like you leave me alone oh I've got to have help and finally in discouragement she turned to go and I stopped her and I said I can tell you who can help you who I said Christ if you will seek him he will be all the help you need and she went out drooping and dragging her feet but she sought Christ and she was gloriously converted then she went even further abroad telling people what had happened to her and that she had to come and find out if it might not happen to them as well and the people came including

her husband who was a notorious reprobate and I sought earnestly to help him by and large he avoided me but once in a while he gave me opportunity but then one day out of burden for him I went into his automobile dealership to see if I could arrange time to meet with him he wasn't there, no one in fact was in the office at all I opened the door to the shop and all of the mechanics were over in a corner in the huddle laughing one of them glanced up and I heard him whisper oh oh the preacher has come and immediately they all stood upright and said sorry preacher we didn't intend for you to hear that well I hadn't heard anything except the whisper the preacher had come but I mentioned that to say dear friends that there was a time when the influence of the church was so great and so real so

right that the people who were determined to sin sinned behind closed doors and under cover of darkness that's not true now so figuratively can we not say the Philistines have filled up the well isn't it wonderful to go to that living fountain and to have your own soul so thoroughly refreshed by Christ himself but all across the land now there are people who are going to mud pits they get nothing nourishing or encouraging or helpful from their church now as I've been making it plain and all of you already knew it I hope before I said it and certainly brother John shares as does Anthony and brother Paul in this conviction we don't make revival happen but we can dig the wells and I'd like you to think about this figure here this picture, this illustration from the standpoint of those of us

who have come under the burden of loving Christ which is a joy but then the burden of intercessors for those who can't pray for themselves and won't pray for themselves and those millions and millions of America who have no church that they know of anywhere near them where they can go and indeed be blessed you folks right here in this church people coming all the way from Knoxville, Tennessee because they are longing for a word they haven't found anywhere in their own area and that's only one I know who knows how many others are coming great distances when they can but let's think about this well that has been stopped up with Philistine junk and I honestly think that's an accurate way to state it the church has lost its ability to meet the thirst of the world because Philistine junk has

been dumped into the well now just think of some of the things that have happened we've got a vast portion of the church that has divided the Bible into chunks and said this chunk applies to that period, this chunk applies to this period you cannot say that here because that belongs there, they've got things so wildly confused that they end up acting as if the Holy Spirit is dead and what a tragedy to plug the well of salvation and to prevent the Holy Spirit from saying anything or at least to try by saying that he no longer works today or by dividing the church into nonsensical pieces now I don't mean to say that these men aren't trying hard but the last thing in the world that is needed is another person's opinion what we need is the word of the Lord so the well has been stuffed with

nonsense in terms of doctrine I have people rightly telling me Mr.

Roberts your problem is you were born at the wrong time in history the way you talk would have fit in 100 years ago but you're just completely out of step well I know some men who've been told they were out of step and they couldn't stand it so they got in step but I don't really care if people think I'm out of step I know I'm right where I belong I don't mean a claim to perfection to that or anything foolish but I do know that the truth I speak is the truth and that it is as valid today as it was 500 years ago and if Christ does not come back and if there's any world left in 100 years it will still be valid isn't it wonderful how relevant the scripture is isn't it wonderful how the scripture does fit together here is in my mind a remarkable thing I have been studying my bible for well over 70 years and I haven't gotten tired of it it hasn't worn out and I'm not saying well now that contradicts this and this is so absurd in the light of that the more I study the more amazed I am how gloriously it all fits together but the well has been loaded with junk including those things were alright in their time but they don't work anymore but they do work and I still find despite the apathy that grips so many congregations that the spirit of God still works.

You know one of the thrilling things that happens to me with regularity I get lots of invitations to preach in churches that might be called liberal or modernist or that are so caught up in their own ideas they've forgotten God has spoken but it's a wonderful thing to be preaching and you're looking in a particular section of the congregation as you preach and you see over there that face that's in a cloud doesn't seem to be any life in the face no joy and then as you preach you see that countenance begin to change and at the end of the service that person rushes up and they say something wonderful happened to me today and you know the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

It's not happening as frequently as I used to see it happen it's not happening as frequently as it will happen yet again as the Lord draws near but it is happening and I refuse to let the well of salvation be messed up with that kind of fallist junk that says these things don't work.

Now we got a lot of people who are talking about conversion and they are reporting converts not long ago I was in conversation with a pastor who was telling me he had baptized 600 people the year before and I asked him what impact did that have upon church attendance oh well the attendance is smaller than it was the year before what 600 converts well we've got a lot of nonsense being taught as conversion people signing the decision card or coming forward or praying the sinners prayer any and all of those could be used of God but so often they are a tool that Satan himself uses to confound people. I think I want to spend whatever strength I have left digging out that well getting rid of that stuff and if people don't like it when I tell them they're wrong well let them take their case to the Lord and see what he says but I'm asking you have you been conscious of the Philistine junk in the well that's the issue before us. Does it trouble you that the world has had more impact on the church than the church has had on the world in recent years whereas it used to be exactly the opposite of that.

Take this nonsense that the church has been waddling in concerning the subject of Lordship as a young man many surprising things happen to me.

I grew up from the time I was 10 in a Presbyterian church in a very formal one turn around collar preacher always wore a robe, all that and when I was about 18 the elders of the church said to me our pastor has been assigned by the government to a six week tour among the military and we've decided to ask you to take his place Sunday morning Sunday night, Wednesday night Bible class lots of other responsibilities well in the prayer meeting there was a woman who thought I was the greatest thing that happened and she just loved to tell this sensational young preacher then maybe about the fourth Wednesday night I talked about that passage in Romans to be carnally minded is death to be spiritually minded is life and I

said there is an absurd notion that a person can be a carnal minded

Christian she flew into a rage just the opposite of the other story I told you started out liking me ended up hating me now that was my first exposure to this idea that has been widely spread since then that a person can accept Christ as their savior and deny him as their lord and be saved and that's a mighty big plug in the well of salvation you're aware of these things do you know what's going on in the church world do you know why we are in such a rotten mess it's not that the politicians are leading us down it's that the church has pulled the politicians down all that's wrong in America was first wrong in the church that's what I'm trying to say the well of salvation speaking figuratively has been clogged with fliston junk we've turned the love of God into soft mush we've made

obedience to Jesus Christ an option you can obey if you want but you don't have to we've taken the commandments and turned them about I mentioned this on Sunday when I told you I wasn't going to rush because it was the Lord's day not the Lord's hour most of the churches I know have practically a fit if you go over 12 o'clock murdering the Pope would not be as serious a crime as running past 12 o'clock I remember so well an older woman that sat in the congregation and there was a clock on the back wall and when it came about 2 minutes to 12 this oversized woman turned around and she studied the clock for 5 minutes I almost said something but that time at least I restrained myself but I've thought of her so many times 5 minutes to read the clock well of course she wasn't reading the clock

she was giving the dumb preacher a message but how can the Holy Spirit work in the framework that the typical church has constrained him these churches that have 3 services in a row I was preaching in Wisconsin one time they told me in advance we have 3 services and this one has to end at 5 minutes so we can get to the next group and so on and then I forgot and didn't pay any attention and the people were absolutely glued to their seats and paying immense attention and then when I ended it was 55 minutes past the appropriate time and to my astonishment the deacons were fairly gracious but they said to me we can't let you do that again because we've got to get the second service out you've only got 15 minutes this time you ran so late the first time so I said well let somebody in the back

give me a signal well a man stood in the back and he went like this well that's enough I just wanted you to get the sense of some of the immense problems that we're struggling with as a result of the activity of the Philistines now let's think about this from another standpoint let's think about it from the standpoint of what we might do.

Now I obviously don't know most of you by name even to say nothing of knowing you in terms of who you really are, what your home life is like, what church you come from and so on.

It would be absurd for me to pretend to know more than I actually do but let's think now of what we ourselves can do. No sense talking about those who aren't here. What can you do about the well being clogged with Philistine junk well you can get to work on the subject of holiness that's an immense issue our Lord said be ye holy as I am holiness that's not a doctrine of a few small holiness churches that's the doctrine of the whole church without holiness no man shall see the Lord you can start with yourself with a fresh determination to be holy.

Then you can take your stand in your church. You may not be very influential, in fact you may not even have the respect of your congregation but you can take your stand and you can with care with love with the help of the Holy Spirit make it clear that Christ has no place in his kingdom for that which is unholy and you can pray and you can witness and you can make it clear that holiness is urgently needed and you can

set the example isn't that the critical thing? I'm so tired of men with a whip trying to force other people to do what they don't do themselves. Obviously real leadership in the church of Christ is to walk so close to Christ that everybody who knows you said, I got to walk right immediately with that person because they're with Christ and if I'm not close I might go astray.

Will you set your heart to walk truly in the beauty of holiness. May I ask you, did you ever have a sense of the beauty of holiness? This is very urgent. Did you ever sit back and say, Lord, I want for myself a picture for me to start with of what it is really like to be holy.

Now we know about snow-capped mountains. We've seen their beauty. We've seen some of these mountain lakes pure, gloriously beautiful.

We know something of the beauty of an antelope racing across the plain. We've looked into the face of many a flower and experienced its beauty. We know something of the beauty even of the human frame, but there is no beauty, no beauty like the beauty of holiness.

Catch a fresh sense of the beauty of holiness. And set your heart again to be so arrayed in the righteous robes of Jesus Christ that holiness will radiate from your life. We can't expect to get the foul junk out of the well if we're unholy ourselves.

And what about passion? I've spoken of it this week. I was deeply moved last week when I was preaching down in North Carolina on a passage out of 1 Peter chapter 4. A passage where there's a lovely arrangement of seven truths and as I was thinking about it, even as I was preaching, I was thinking, oh, how wonderful. God himself created us passionate beings.

And tragically, many of us have used our passions to advance ourselves, our wishes, our desires, often corrupt desires. But oh, think of what it would be like to have all of your passions channeled in the direction of the plan and the purpose of God. The church is being killed by people who don't have enough passion even to keep the front row awake.

But what if your life was a passionate life where everybody who saw you thought, oh, wow, I would like to be on fire for Christ that way. Nothing unreasonable when the Philistines have clogged the well with all this passionless absurdity. Why not go for a well full of passion, full of power, full of praise, full of pardon? In short, my dear friend, I'm asking you to get a hold of the gospel shovel and clean the well out and let the grace of Christ flow.

Think of an artesian well clogged with Philistine junk and unplugged by you and other godly people so the well of salvation is springing up to life eternal. While our time is gone, help us, Lord. Oh, help us.

Give us courage. Give us power. Give us passion.

Give us purity that once again the world might see true Christianity for Christ's sake. Amen.

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