

When Satan Possesses A Culture

by Steve Gallagher

This sermon delves into Matthew 23, focusing on the pride and hypocrisy of the Pharisees during Passion Week. It explores the dangers of self-righteousness, pretension, and love of veneration, highlighting the spiritual hierarchy of demonic entities and the importance of surrendering to God amidst a culture influenced by Satan. The message emphasizes the need for genuine repentance, humility, and a true transformation of the heart to avoid the impending judgment and embrace God's grace and love.

Scripture: Matthew 23:12, Matthew 6:1, Romans 8:6, Galatians 5:25, John 12:43, Proverbs 16:18, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 3:19

Topics: "Pride and Hypocrisy", "Genuine Repentance and Humility"

Description

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Transcript

Good morning everyone. So, on me to deal with Matthew 23, I would have preferred to have Matthew 24, which Nate gets next week, or 25, which Luke gets the following week, but this is the way the cards were dealt. This occurs on Wednesday of Passion Week.

Tomorrow night, the ordeal that Jesus is going to go through for the sake of our souls is going to begin tomorrow night. For over three years, the Lord has presented himself as the Messiah, irrefutable, irrefutable proof of being the long-awaited Messiah, but mostly the people of Israel rejected him, mostly. There's a couple of purposes I think Jesus gave this strong word that day.

I'll get to the to one of them later on, but let me just mention right now in passing that in two days he's going to be gone, and the entire future of the church is in the hands of 11 feeble men, and it's imperative that he tells the Jewish people the truth about the Pharisees and the religious system they had established, and the spirit that they were in. It was imperative, it was vital, they had to hear it. Now the title of my message is When Satan Possesses a Culture, and we know that in the kingdom of darkness there are principalities, there are powers, there are rulers, there are domains, there are millions of demonic entities who do the malevolent work of Satan, and this speaks of a spiritual hierarchy that's in that unseen

realm.

There's some kind of spiritual hierarchy. Paul just touches on it a little bit here and there. You know the Bible doesn't describe it in great detail, but the Word of God gives us enough to help us to see that there is a whole world of spirits out there at work, and there is a hierarchy, and it's evident from Scripture that, for instance, there are principalities who rule over geopolitical realms.

For instance, in Daniel 10, we hear about the prince, basically the same word in the Greek as principality. We hear about the prince of Persia, Iran, and the prince of Greece, who were warring with Michael. Powerful, demonic beings at war with Michael and God's angels.

But I also believe that these realms aren't just limited to geopolitical, physical regions. I believe that the enemy, this is where it gets dicey, because it's hard to... I can tell you what I think, okay? I don't know for a fact that it's this way. I believe it's this way.

I believe that there are powerful principalities that become embedded in people groups, and those people groups are drawn to the spirit, whatever that spirit is in. You know, angels, whether they're fallen or holy, have personalities as diverse as our personalities. You know, there's billions of human beings.

Everyone has a unique personality, a unique temperament. A lot of things define our uniqueness. It's the same in the spiritual realm.

These angelic beings and the demonic beings, they're not all just carbon copy, robotic, you know, evil spirits. They have personalities. And I believe that they, whatever it is that they gave themselves over to, is, let me just put it this way, there are unclean spirits that inhabit the vast realm of pornography and sexual sin.

All that's involved with the realm of sexual sin, trafficking, sex workers, promiscuity, just all of it, homosexuality, all of it, there are demonic spirits at work in that realm. And there's a, it's a characteristic of some ruling principality, I think. I think that's true.

There are spirits of greed that inhabit the realm of big business. Control these men. They're given over.

Some of the men out there, you know the big names, I believe they're probably even possessed by spirits of greed and power. They want more and more and more. They're never satisfied.

And there are spirits of murder, no doubt, in crime families and syndicates and so on. But I also believe there are spirits of spiritual pride that embed themselves in the world of religion. And that is what became entrenched in first century Israel.

Some kind of powerful, ruling, demonic entity that established this religious system that was anti-God. So, obviously, in this chapter, the primary thing that Jesus is focusing on here is pride. And just as a refresher, if you've read the iBook, or if you haven't, then this will be the first time you hear it, maybe.

I gave my best shot at a definition of pride. And I said that pride is having an exaggerated sense of one's own importance and a selfish preoccupation with one's own rights. It's the attitude that says, I am more important than you.

And if need be, I will promote my cause and protect my rights at your expense. And we live by that mantra. It's like Nate was saying, we speak these kinds of things to ourselves constantly, deep in our hearts.

Nobody talks to me like that. Nobody's going to treat me like that. I'm going to have things the way I want them.

Those are the kinds of thoughts that go on in the fallen nature. And if you don't think that's in you, you're in big trouble. You can't even get to first base to get free of it if you don't realize what's going on inside of you.

So pride is the preeminent issue that Jesus is dealing with in this chapter. And there is a spirit. I mean, Satan is what? The personification of pride.

That definition defines who he is. And whoever this entity is, was, that was there, that defines what he was like. You guys should be falling out of your chairs.

You know, this is pretty powerful stuff. Amen, amen. I can see I'm overwhelming you.

All right, so let's look at three of the types of pride that I see in here. You know, if this chapter is loaded, we would be here for hours if we really wanted to go through everything meticulously. But I limited it to three.

So the first one is pride in the form of the love of veneration. Now, I know that's a big word for you. That's people that are from Kentucky.

They're not even laughing at my jokes today. All right, let's look at verses five to seven. Jesus is speaking of the Pharisees, of course.

They do all their deeds. Everything they do is to be seen by others, for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts, and the best seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the marketplace, and being called rabbi by others. All right, and Jesus adds another one in Sermon on the Mount.

I'm going to go ahead and throw it in here. He says in Matthew 6, and when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

So, we're told here about five things the Pharisees loved. They loved the place of honor at banquets. They loved it.

I can't say it strong enough. They knew that that seat up there at the head table was waiting for them, and they loved to come in with all the people watching them come in. Oh, there's, what would they call him, rabbi so-and-so, and he, you know, sits down and just drinks in all the adoration.

They loved that, and they loved the chief seats in the synagogue. So, there again, you know, up at the front, there's going to be a chair for a Pharisee, and he's going to come in after everyone's there, and all the people are going to watch him go up there, and he loves to sit down and just look out at the adoring crowd. He loved that.

They loved to receive respectful greetings in the marketplaces, you know, because the people, listen, these were the rulers of Israel. Yeah, the Romans ruled over them, but it was the Pharisees who had the actual rule over the people. People were terrified of them, because if they put you out of the synagogue, which they could do at any time, that meant you were ostracized from your family, from everybody.

You would be treated like dirt. So, people feared them, and so they would come, you know, when they'd see them out at the market or whatever, they would bow their heads and say, hello rabbi so-and-so, you know, very respectful. They loved being called rabbi by men.

They loved to be seen praying in public, oh mighty God, you know, that kind of stuff. There's only one reason they did the things they did. It was to be noticed by men.

That was their prevailing purpose in all that they did. John later, I mean, Jesus later said in John 12, they loved human approval rather than the approval of God. I mean, that really says it all, and that is something that's, you know, a lot of church people are very much that way.

This is what these men lived for. You know, they would get an endorphin flush or whatever when these things would happen. It was like just a rush of whatever you call it, well-being or something, when they would be treated like this by people.

They were addicted to it, just like you and I have been addicted to pleasure. These men were addicted to getting veneration from man. And, you know, this is in the church as well at some level, not at this level, you know, it's not the whole pastoral thing or anything like that, but it is in the church.

I've long lamented that it isn't the godly pastors, the humble pastors, the most loving pastors who are honored in the church. It's who? It's the pastors with the biggest churches, right? Aren't they the ones that get the honor? Or ministers who are on 55 different radio stations or whatever it is. Now the point isn't that, you know, if you have a radio show or you have a big church that you're prideful.

That's not even what I'm saying. I'm just saying that it isn't right that in the church success is what defines who should be receiving honor. It isn't right.

There are godly men in little churches scattered around the country who never receive any accolades. They just quietly go about God's business week in, week out, pouring their hearts out to their people, trying to lead their people to the Lord, and so on and so on, and never get any recognition for it. What does that tell us? The second thing I'll touch on here is pride in the form of pretension.

Look at verses 25 to 28. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside you're full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and the plate that the outside also may be clean.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead man's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Man, what a scathing, piercing rebuke that went right into the the heart of what these men were and the spirit that they were in.

You know, you could not fool Jesus. He would walk into a room full of people, and if He set His eyes on someone, He could read that person's mail instantly. He could look at that person.

He could know the spirit he's in, know what his struggles were, all that was going on inside him, what his future held. He showed that many times in different passages, different stories and anecdotes. And He looked at these men that were there that day, and what He saw inside them was just what it was.

It was so sickening, and the revulsion He must have felt looking at these are the men who are supposed to be leading My people, and look at what they're like inside. Just greedy to have everything they wanted, just filling themselves with every indulgence, full of spiritual uncleanness, Jesus said. The Phillips says that their inward parts were like an open sewer.

That pretty much says it. Full of lawlessness, meaning there's no stop signs inside them, no fear of God. They wanted something, they'd go for it, even if they had to hide it under the pretense of what they were, you know, their supposed religion.

Full of hypocrisy, constantly conniving how to present themselves as godly and pious, when the reality was something completely different inside. Now listen to what Rex Andrews says here. This is really important, and please listen to this.

If you haven't heard anything else, listen to this. There can never be any deliverance for a man from the power of the devil, except as the heart is opened up and exposed. Jesus charged directly in words that their inward part, their heart, was full of lust, uncleanness, and all wickedness.

They didn't refute that particularly, they just wanted a killing. People do not like to have their hearts exposed. And that's what our counselors have to deal with all the time in this place, is because their job is to help you to see what you don't want to look at.

It's the only hope you have, really, man, is that someone will care enough about you, like Nate was sharing, care enough about you to help you to see the reality of what you're in. The third thing I'll touch on here is they had a pride in the form of self-righteousness. Now, you know, it goes without saying that the history of God and mankind is, we understand instinctively that God expects his people to live righteous lives.

We know that. It's one of the paramount characteristics of his people, or what they should be anyway. David said the Lord is righteous.

He loves righteousness. The upright will behold his face. The psalmist said the righteous will never be moved.

He will be remembered forever. And Solomon said the way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but he loves him who pursues righteousness. The people of Israel understood this, but then in the first century, Jesus comes along and he says something a little different.

This is also in Matthew 6. He says, beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who's in heaven. You know, in the Old Testament times, the Jewish people gave themselves over to idolatry and pagan wickedness, but by the time Jesus came, all of that had been swept out of there and they had developed a religious system which allowed them to portray themselves as righteous.

Now, verse 28, he says it right here, that the only righteousness these Pharisees had was this outward image that they presented to others. Now, self-righteousness is kind of a difficult term to define. In fact, I looked around for a definition of it.

I couldn't find a definition of it. Not even Webster's 1828 Dictionary wanted to broach it. I guess, you know, the way I would define it is it is a righteousness of one's own making.

I guess that's the best way to say it. It's just a righteousness of one's own making. But let's dig a little deeper in this for a couple minutes.

The best way I can think to get it across, different facets of it, aspects of it, is to describe people that are self-righteous. And so one thing I would say about them is that a self-righteous person lives his faith out in the flesh. I mean, if it's self-righteousness, then it only makes sense that our faith would also be built in our self-life, right? It would be coming forth from our self-life.

The difference between someone who is living out his faith in the flesh and one who's living out his faith in the Spirit really comes down to surrender. That's really what it boils down to. You know, I remember I talked about that a couple weeks ago in Romans 8. I was talking about having the mind of the Spirit or the mind of the flesh and all that.

That's really kind of the same sort of thing. These people, people who have a righteousness of their own, the reason they don't want to surrender is because they are afraid of giving up control of their lives. And when you fear giving God control of your life, what does that say about your trust for him, right? What does that say? Where is your trust? God's righteousness is imputed to the man who has surrendered himself, surrendered control of his life.

It says in Romans 8, let's see, how does it say it? No, now I can't remember. Maybe it's Galatians 5 and I didn't write it down. But basically, the sons of God are those who are led by the Spirit, led by the Spirit.

That means that you are taking your marching orders from God in a very real way in your daily life. That's what it means. It's been my experience that people who have a righteousness of their own must, they must create their own version of righteousness, basically.

And so the way that goes on in the American church world is we have a, you know, we have an unwritten list of do's and don'ts. And I've talked about this in the past, it's probably been a while, but I've talked in the past about how people come into this, into Christianity. Many, many people come into Christianity by osmosis.

And meaning, you just kind of instinctively figure out the things you're supposed to do and the things you're not supposed to do. The last thing you want to do in a church setting is say a cuss word, for instance. Right? That ain't cool.

And you'll get some real frowns and all kinds of stuff, you know. So we learn the things, how we're supposed to act, and we just kind of learn to emulate those people around us. But the problem is a lot of those people are no further along than we are.

And so you have people who are just kind of following along with the crowd. And they're not, they're doing their utmost not to break those outward rules that would make them stand out as looking bad. But that isn't the righteousness of God, folks.

It's not. It doesn't look like that. You're not looking for the approval of man, you're looking for the approval of God.

And when you're looking for the approval of God, it affects the way you are living your life. It affects the way you think. People with a righteousness of their own making must believe the best about themselves.

They have to live in self-flattering, constantly trying to convince themselves and, yeah, that they are walking with God. You know, when a person who is in self-righteousness, because they're constantly puffing themselves up inside, what that does is that causes them to disdain others, just like the Pharisees did. And so a person with his own righteousness looks at others and clearly sees every fault and is quick to assume the worst case scenario about that person's intentions.

It's getting quiet in here, Pastor Ed. Do I need to repeat that again? A person in his own righteousness, because he's constantly flattering himself, is constantly at the same, by the same token, putting others down in his heart. And so he's constantly criticizing and fault-finding and assuming the worst case scenario about that person's intentions.

But then when he looks at his own heart, he's overwhelmingly generous to himself. And he judges himself not by the worst case scenario, not even by reality. He doesn't judge himself by what he thinks and the way he acts.

He judges himself by his good intentions. Most self-righteous people are in the habit of thinking that they're right in life. They just go through life with a confidence inside that they're just right, right in their opinions, right in their ideas, their notions, the things they do.

They're just right. I wrote this in one of my books. I honestly can't remember which one it is, but let me just read this.

Coming into a true knowledge about oneself is very humbling. The wonderful benefit of it is that as the believer becomes smaller in his own mind, God becomes greater. As the person's awareness grows about the limitations of his own goodness, thereby diminishing the blinding effects of self-righteousness, the way is open for him to see the infinite goodness of God.

As he sees how selfish he is by nature, he becomes more cognizant of the Lord's selflessness. When he recognizes how little love he actually has for others, his eyes will be opened to the Lord's overwhelming love. It's that coming down, men.

It's that humbling of yourself that allows God to fill in with himself, with his righteousness, with his goodness, with his love, our own lack. This is the spirit that Jesus was putting his finger on that day. The Pharisees lived out their faith in the flesh.

They refused to surrender to the Lord because they wanted to stay in control of their own lives. They believed they were right in and of themselves and refused to acknowledge being right, I mean, wrong about anything. And it's amazing how people just will not say they're wrong.

And I mean church people. The Pharisees constantly flattered themselves, bent on only seeing the best about themselves. The Pharisees disdained others and loved themselves too much to detect their own sin.

They never came to truly trust God because they only trusted themselves. This is what Satan embedded into that culture of the first century. Man, it's unbelievable that Jesus went into that full of the love of God, but also full of the truth of God.

You know, in this chapter, Jesus issues seven woes in there. If you have eight, it's because verse 14 shouldn't be in there. Some translations have it in there.

It's not in the earliest manuscripts. But anyway, Jesus issued seven woes, seven curses on these men, each one for some type of sin they were involved in. But these men had created a religion they could live with.

It was just enough to convince them that they were in good standing with God. It was a religion that didn't demand they surrendered to the Lord. It was a form of godliness that kept the power of God at bay.

They were willing to obey certain religious rules, but were unwilling to submit to God in their heart. Jesus told them, fill up then the measure of your fathers. What a terrifying thing to hear.

Because what he's referring to there is the cup of judgment. And you know, it's spoken of throughout scripture, the cup of judgment. And it's tied to the wickedness of man.

And it's referring to unrepentant people, who month after month, year after year, just keep sinning and sinning and sinning. And the cup is getting fuller and fuller and fuller. You know, God is very tolerant.

But there comes a point, he says, my spirit will not always strive with man. There comes a point where not one more sin is going to occur, because judgment is going to fall. You know, this sounds like nice preacher talk.

I just heard yesterday, I don't know how many times I've heard this. Another man who went through this program met an untimely death. I knew the guy.

I prayed for him. I cared about him. And I just found out that he died a few years after he left the program.

And I've heard that story over and over again. We just don't know. But whether death outwardly comes or not, what's worse than that, maybe even, is just the judgment people in unrepentant sin just keep piling on and adding up.

Jesus went on to tell them, you serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Then he says something really surprising. I think it's verse 35. He says, I'm going to send prophets and wise men and scribes to you.

And I say, it doesn't make sense. You've just said they're not going to respond to you, Lord. Why would you do that? And not only that, these godly men, you're going to send to them, they're going to persecute.

Why would you do that? I don't understand your logic here, Lord. And I listened to a John MacArthur sermon on this passage, and this is what he said about that. It was pretty revealing.

He said, when you hear the message of Jesus Christ, it is a message unto salvation, or it is a message unto judgment. And the more you hear it, the more it comes to you as a message of grace. And the more you reject it, the more it piles upon you the guilt of judgment.

For the more you have, the more you're responsible for. Better off only to have heard once than to hear a multiplicity of times and continue to reject. You just pile on greater guilt.

The purpose sometimes is to bring the grace of salvation to the heart, and God is glorified through His grace. You know, when I heard Mark and who else prayed? Huh? Binning. Both of them were praying for God's grace to come forth this day, and I, because I knew what I was going to be reading.

It's like, wow, Lord, you really are in this, and the things these two shared also. The purpose other times is to compound guilt, to bring judgment, and God is equally glorified through His judgment because God is as much a God of judgment as He is a God of grace. Now guys, last Sunday, I don't know what you experienced out there on the parking lot, but what I experienced is exactly what I told you it was going to be.

God pouring out His Spirit, and He came in a wonderful flood of love. His love was poured out on you guys. He was letting you know how much He loves you.

And so in our Wednesday senior meeting, I was anxious to hear from these guys the fruit, you know, what came out of that, and these are the comments they made. Speaking of you guys, they think they're fine with the Lord in spite of the sin in their lives. Many are making light of their sin, in essence saying it's not a big deal.

Some men regularly come to the altar, but there's no change in their lives. Very few see their need for transformation. Overall, there is an exaggerated sense of where they are with God.

That's what Luke and Jordan told me Wednesday. You know, one of the prayers we pray every Thursday here, when we're praying for the residential program for you guys, and so on, is we plead with God to bring us men who are hungry for the Lord, who really want a new life in God. They're ready to repent, ready to humble themselves, ready for the Lord to do something.

That's our prayer for those men out there. Then we spend a lot of most of our time just praying for those who are here, but that's our prayer. And I've asked the Lord a number of times down through the years, Lord, why? Why do you send men here who hear truth in this place and don't respond? I don't understand it, Lord.

Why? Why do you do that? I would rather there was 20 men in the program if they were hungry for God than to have men who come here and just reject the Lord. But MacArthur answered that for me. Our job, it's just become more and more real to us on senior staff.

It's going to get darker and darker, the spiritual climate in America. It is happening, man. Listen, you're new here.

I've been doing this for 38 years in this place, and I've seen how over the years men have grown more cold towards the things of God, harder hearted, more unwilling to humble themselves to God. Every year it seems like it's another step down, another step down, another step down. We are coming into the apostasy.

It's so real to me, and this is where I really see it, is in the spirit of the men in the program who should be coming here desperate, but just sit and argue with their counselors and defend themselves and so on. You know, God poured out his love here. I said this in sexual idolatry in the last chapter.

I said the dangerous thing about savoring God's love while in a state of unrepentant sin is that a person can actually be deceived, thinking he's in true fellowship with the Lord. No, let me explain why God pours out his love on you, because he's trying to win you to himself. That's the point.

It's not to further your delusion and your deception. It's to try to win you to himself. He's trying to show you what you can have for all eternity if you'll humble yourself.

He does love you, but that doesn't stop the reality of judgment. I should have an altar call. I just should.

I'm just kind of afraid to because, you know, I just feel like I don't want to despair. I have faith in the Lord. I know what he can do.

I know what the Lord can do, and I know the Lord has been speaking to your hearts before today. He's been speaking to you for months, probably. Josh, come on up.

I'm not looking for some big flood of bodies to come up here. You know, there's something about going to an altar call and not being serious about it that's kind of frightening to me. I mean, what are you saying to the Lord? Well, I got to show my counselor that I mean business and whatever.

I don't know. I don't know what, I don't even understand any of this. You know, I don't mean to put myself up as some great example.

It's just the way I'm wired, but I was either going to be all in or all out. I can't. Many times I said to myself, I can't understand why these guys would subject themselves to the hardships of this program if they're not meaning business with God.

Why put yourself through this? Nothing good is going to come of it. God brought you here to meet you, to give you his life, and I'm just not wired that way. I don't know what that would even be like to be going through a program and be determined to keep my sin, to keep my life, to keep God at bay.

I can't even comprehend the logic in that. I'm going to pray, and while I'm praying, I'm not even going to have you stand up. I'm not going to make it easy.

I'm going to pray, and if you want to come down here and get right with God, you just slip out right now and just come down here. Lord, I know. Let God be true in every man a liar.

Doesn't matter, Lord, how people respond to you, whether they respond or not, or if they continue to reject you, Lord, it doesn't matter because I know you're true, Lord. I know you've given yourself to these men. I know you love them.

You want them, and I pray God before it's too late for these men. I don't know. There may be men in here whose cups are almost to the brim.

How many more years do they have to go on rejecting you and committing abominable things in your sight before they will repent? Lord, I pray for those who did come forward. Please, God, reach into their hearts and help them across that line, Lord, and I don't doubt because I've seen this happen so many times. When we have a service, a message like this, there will be those bailing out of the program in the next day or two.

God, help them. Help them to come to an end of themselves out there. They won't get find you here.

That's done. Once they walk out of here, it's over here, but if they have so hardened themselves that after all you've done to try to reach them, that they're going to leave this place in rebellion. All I can pray, God, is that you would, in judgment, have mercy.

I pray for the men who are in the program who are trying to do the right thing. God, help them by your grace. By your grace, Lord, come alongside them and help them and carry them through.

Make them to know that they truly are right with you, but Lord, don't let a single man leave this chapel today in self-deception. I pray do for them what you did for Nate, but Nate was ready for the truth, and I pray that you will do that for them. And for these men who have responded at this altar, God, come to them.

Do a mighty work in their hearts, I pray. Bring your righteousness into their lives, God, so that they can know the joy of God living out his life through them. Do that for them, I pray, in Jesus' name, amen.

You may be dismissed. Let's keep it quiet in here. Feel free to stay if you would.

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