

All That Jesus Taught Bible Study - Part 68

by Zac Poonen

Jesus warns against hypocrisy and deception, emphasizing the importance of a clean inner life and the dangers of false teachings.

Duration: 25:51

Scripture: Matthew 23:26, Luke 14:26

Topics: "Inner Purity", "Deception in the Last Days"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of inner purity over outward appearances in his sermon on Matthew 23:26, where Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. He explains that true discipleship requires a strong inner foundation, akin to a building's foundation, which must be prioritized over external displays of righteousness. Poonen warns against the dangers of deception in the last days, urging believers to love the truth and seek salvation from sin rather than merely adhering to the law. He highlights the tragic fate of those who reject God's prophets and the consequences of a desolate spiritual state. Ultimately, he calls for a genuine transformation from within to ensure that the outside reflects the inner purity of one's life.

Transcript

We continue our study today in All That Jesus Taught. This is the series we've been doing for the past number of sessions. And we are today at Matthew chapter 23 and verse 26.

Jesus said, You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may also be clean. The mark of a hypocrite, he called them hypocrites in the previous verse, is that his inner life does not correspond to his outer life. And I would say this is true of the vast majority of people who call themselves believers.

Now the sad thing is they don't even seem to be concerned about it. If they were concerned about it, the Lord would have led them into victory. But when they are not concerned about it, then the Lord doesn't lead them further.

This is the tragedy. Here it says, first clean the inside of the cup. In other words, concentrate on the inside first and not the outside.

So you need to ask yourself, which part of your life do you concentrate on? Which is more important? In a building you can have a skyscraper, maybe 70-80 floors that's visible. Underneath that is a foundation. Which do you think is more important? Those upper floors or the foundation? Any contractor or engineer will tell you.

The strength of those upper floors depends 100% on the strength of the foundation. If the foundation is weak, even a building with one floor will collapse. That's why engineers concentrate on laying a good foundation.

Jesus also said about laying a good foundation. But on that foundation we must build a super structure. If you don't, we are like that man Jesus spoke about who didn't want to be a disciple.

He spoke about discipleship in Luke 14, 26-33. And in the middle of that he speaks about someone who doesn't want to be a disciple. What does he do? He just lays a foundation, doesn't build anything.

There's no super structure. Either that or we could say a person like Jesus said in Matthew 7, verse 26 onwards. The foolish man who built a house but with no foundation.

These are two opposites. Both are foolish. We need a foundation and on that we build a super structure.

And so here the Lord tells the Pharisees, first lay the foundation. And then don't stop there, build a super structure. But in case of our life, it's like this, that if you take care of the inside, the outside will automatically take care of itself.

There's no doubt about it. You put the seed in the ground and water it, it will automatically come up. That inner life, for example, if I allow my mind to be renewed, so that I'm not angry with people, I will not commit murder.

If my inner attitude is right, then the outer life will be okay. If in my inner life I don't lust after women, I'm not in danger of committing adultery. If in my inner life I decide to love my enemies, I will have no problem externally loving my neighbors.

So you don't have to make an effort to clean up your external life, if you clean the inside. It's something like this, you know, we can take an example. The law was like a tube of ointment that I could use on my body whenever I have a sore.

It's a very effective ointment. I get a sore and I rub the ointment and it goes off. But tomorrow it comes on the other hand.

And then I have to rub the ointment there, it goes off, then it comes on my leg, and then somewhere else. So I need this tube of ointment all the time to keep my external body looking clean. But the inner disease that causes these sores on my hands is never healed.

I just go around rubbing this ointment every day. That's how the law was. All the thou shalt's and thou shalt not's were meant to prevent sin from coming forth and destroying the nation.

And that's what the law is, that's why we have all the laws in different countries. If you violate it, you're jailed or you're hanged or something like that. That's the way you preserve countries with certain law and order.

And all those laws are basically based on the Ten Commandments. But Jesus came with an axe to the root and saying, I want to deal with the problem at its root. It's like somebody saying, a doctor saying, hey listen, there's a new antibiotic that's been discovered, which if you take, it'll deal with the problem that's causing these sores inside your body.

And then you won't need this tube of ointment. You can throw away the tube of ointment because the problem is solved inside with the antibiotic, and then you won't get these sores. This is the difference between law and grace.

So which is better, the antibiotic or the tube of ointment? Which is better, grace or law? It's so clear. But a lot of people when they talk about grace, they throw away the tube of ointment and they haven't taken the antibiotic and they keep getting sores. And that's why Christians, the life of the average Christian is a hundred times worse than the life of a God-fearing Jew who lived under the law.

Because he at least had the tube of ointment. Here's a Christian who talks about grace, doesn't have the tube of ointment and doesn't even have taken the antibiotic. So we should throw away the tube of ointment only when we have taken the antibiotic.

We can throw away law when we've got that inner grace that's purified our inner life. Otherwise you better keep the law. So that's what we see here.

If we deal with the problem inside, there will be no need to deal with anything outside. It says here, you clean the inside of the cup of the dish and so that, notice that, so that the outside will automatically become clean. If you deal with the inside, the outside will be clean.

He doesn't say first clean the inside and then go and clean the outside. There will be no need to clean the outside. The inside will automatically be clean.

And he says, but you scribes and Pharisees like whitewashed tombs. The outside looks so beautiful, you know how grandly tombs are made sometimes. But inside it's full of dead men's bones.

Look at the illustrations the Lord uses. Death inside, but such beautiful decorations on the outside. A perfect description of many, many Christians who want to look so nice on the outside with their singing and their preaching and their external impressions they give of Christianity in their grand cathedrals and buildings, but their inner life is corrupt.

Even so, many of you outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you're full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Then he goes on to say, you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous and say 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 that you're sons of those who murdered the prophets. This is a very common thing. It's very easy to admire the saints who lived 300 years ago, 200 years ago, who are dead and gone, and in their lifetime those saints were called by all types of bad names, heretics, false prophets, and bills of bull, etc.

But now that they're dead and gone, people sing their praises. This is true of all the great men that evangelical Christians admire, whether it's Martin Luther or John Wesley or William Booth or D.L. Moody or Charles Finney. It's very easy to admire all of them, you know, these ancient prophets, God's men

whom God raised up to stand for Him and to bring forth a certain truth.

But in their lifetime all those people were called heretics and false prophets and called by all types of bad names. Now we sing their praises. So living prophets today are maligned in exactly the same way.

If there's a living prophet anywhere in the world, he'd invariably be called a heretic and a false teacher and a cult leader and all types of names like that, just like those people were called 150 years ago. But wait till this prophet dies and 50 years later they'll be acknowledging him as a prophet. This has been the history throughout 2000 years of church history of how Christians deal with the dead and with the living.

So that's what he's saying here. He says, oh, we would not have murdered those prophets who lived in ancient times like Isaiah and Zechariah and all who were killed by our fathers. We would not have done that.

They made monuments on the tombs of these people. But the fact is, how were they treating the greatest prophet who was walking in them as Jesus Christ? And that showed up their hypocrisy. And then, further, fill up then the measure of the guilt of your fathers, he says.

You serpents, verse 33, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell? We're trying to understand all that Jesus taught by his life, by the way he spoke and his words. A Christ-like person is one who behaves like Christ and talks like Christ. What would you say of a preacher who looked at people and said, you serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell to religious people sitting with their Bibles in a congregation? Would you ever think that that person could be Christ-like? He may be the greatest prophet in your generation, as Jesus was in his generation, but because of a faulty understanding of Christ-likeness, you may say, he lacks grace, he's not Christ-like.

You know, this whole phrase Christ-like is used by people who don't know what Christ is like. And that's how they deceive themselves and deceive others who don't know the Bible, who haven't read the Gospels. We need to have a balanced understanding of what it is to be Christ-like.

Verse 34, Behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes, the Lord says. Some of them you will kill and crucify. Some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city.

This is the lot of any true prophet whom God sends. I am sending, says the Lord. When I send you a prophet, when I send you a man who preaches and lives according to the scripture, you will kill some of them, you'll crucify some of them, you will scourge them in your synagogues, you'll persecute them from one city to city, another city, calling them all types of names, you'll chase them around here and there, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation. So the Lord was saying here, what would be the fate of a true prophet of God? A true prophet is never popular in Christendom. Those who really fear God will love him and respect him, like the people who really feared God in Jesus' time, loved and respected him and were willing to lay down their lives for him, like the eleven disciples, for example.

But the multitudes of people who studied the scriptures and were evangelical in doctrine in that time, the Pharisees, they thought he was the prince of devils and called him all types of names. We must remember, this is exactly the same in Paul's time. The religious Jews thought Paul was a false teacher

and heretic.

But those who really loved him, the true disciples of Jesus, they really thought he was the apostle of God. So your view of a true servant of God, let me tell you this, the way you look at a true servant of God is a pretty good indication of your spiritual condition. If you despise him, you reveal your spiritual condition.

If you value him, you know your spiritual condition. And Jesus doesn't say all this without any heart. You see the beautiful balance between truth and grace in this same chapter.

He speaks so hard against the Pharisees right up to verse 36 and then you see these tender words. He wept over Jerusalem, it says in Luke's Gospel. He lamented over Jerusalem saying, Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her.

How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold your house is left to you desolate. I say to you from now on, you shall not see me until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

A time comes when the patience of God comes to an end. And the Lord waited three and a half years, waiting, waiting, waiting for Jerusalem, the people in Jerusalem, the religious people to turn and accept him. They rejected him, rejected him, rejected him.

They wanted to have nothing to do with him. He was patient with them and he longed to gather them like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings to protect them from danger and to lead them to God. But they didn't want it.

How often he says, how frequently I wanted to do this, how much I went here, traveled here day and night, not doing, serving you for money or any gain, but to bless you. But you were not interested. Now your house is left to you desolate.

It's not my father's house anymore. Once upon a time he called it my father's house. Now it is your house.

It's a sad thing when the Lord turns around to a church and says, this is my church. Now it is yours. Go and do what you like with it.

You know that the Lord has said that to many a church? And if you don't listen to the word of God, your church can become like that. God sends you prophets to speak the word. And the word of a prophet will not be something that tickles your ears.

It'll be a hard word to remove the cancers from your life. You reject it. Keep rejecting it.

One day God's patience comes to an end. And he says, your house is left to you desolate. And he says, from now on you won't see me anymore.

I'm going. And soon after that he left. He sent it to heaven.

And he says, you will not see me again till one day you see me coming in glory in the second coming. And you'll say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. By the time that generation and many other generations would have died and gone to hell.

It's a tremendous tragedy when a generation of leaders reject the word of God. How many other people it affects. Every pastor, elder, servant of God must take seriously his responsibility to lead people to the truth of God.

We now come to chapter 24. And Jesus came out from the temple where he was speaking and he was going away. When his disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to him.

He says, what a beautiful building this is. And he answered and said to them, do you see all these things? Do you not see them? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another which will not be torn down. He was prophesying this temple will be torn down completely.

There won't be one stone left on top of the other. It was something that was going to take place in the future. We know from history that it took place 40 years later when the Roman general came and destroyed the temple.

But Jesus was prophesying as the spirit inspired him of what was going to happen. And when the disciples heard it, you know, he was sitting in the Mount of Olives and the disciples came to him privately and said, tell us when is that going to be? When is this temple going to be destroyed? And they thought that would be the second coming of Christ. When the temple is destroyed, that's it, the second coming of Christ.

What will be the sign of your coming at the end of the age? They asked three questions there and they thought it was all together. But it wasn't all together. The temple was destroyed 40 years after Christ's death.

The second coming of Christ has still not taken place after 2,000 years. And the end of the whole age of human history will be even another 1,000 years beyond that. So these were three separate questions which they thought was all one.

The temple was such a big thing to them that they thought if this is destroyed, that's it, that's the end of the world. But it wasn't like that. And Jesus answered and said, see to it that no one misleads you.

And in the rest of that chapter, he was answering all three questions together. Combining the last two, but basically we can say two of them. What will be, when will this happen? The destruction of the temple and when will you return? So he said, first of all I want to say to you, don't be deceived.

Many will come in my name saying I am the Christ and will mislead many. Now we need to understand that verse properly. How many people have you heard who have stood up and said I am Jesus Christ? I think in the history of the world there may have been a few handful of lunatics who have said that.

But mislead many? How many people would be misled if some person got up in the pulpit and said I am Jesus Christ? I don't think any Christian I know would ever be deceived by that. Certainly no born again Christian. What did he mean? I think we misunderstood that verse.

What he is saying is, many will come in my name and say that I Jesus Christ am the real Christ, the Messiah, that Jesus is the Messiah. Let me read it like that. Many will come in my name, Jesus name, and say that's right, Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.

And then will go around misleading people. Because if they say Jesus is not the Messiah, then of course they are not even Christians. They are not the ones he is warning about.

He is warning about people who accept Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, and then mislead others. So many will come in my name and say yes, it is true that I am the Christ. When he says I, Jesus is referring to himself.

That he is the Christ and will mislead many. That's how you got to read that verse. Then you understand, oh, then there have been many, many people like that throughout history who have said yes, Jesus is the Christ and they have gone around with all types of wrong doctrines that have misled millions in these two thousand years.

That's the first warning he gave. What will be the sign of your coming? Deception. Widespread deception.

Again, he says in verse 11, many. Notice the word many. Many in verse 5. Many in verse 11.

False prophets will come and mislead many. That's the second thing he says. Again, further down in verse 24.

False Christ and false prophets will arise and show great signs to mislead if possible even the elect. I've told you in advance. It's interesting that though he spoke about many, many signs here like famines, earthquakes, wars in verse 7 and persecution, the one thing that he kept repeating at least three times is deception.

So one of the primary characteristics of the last days will be there will be a tremendous amount of deception in Christianity. All types of false teachings. How shall we escape this deception? I think that is the thing which we need to really understand.

How shall we escape all this deception? Before we go into what all type of deception there is, it says here there will even be people showing great signs and wonders. You know, Paul says in 2nd Thessalonians about the coming of the Antichrist which will be with a whole lot of false signs and wonders in 2nd Thessalonians 2, 9 the coming of the Antichrist is in accord with the activity of Satan with all power and signs and false wonders. So there's going to be a lot of false miracles, fake, counterfeit healings and all types of people coming in the name of Jesus, saying that Jesus is the Messiah and deceiving many people.

How shall we escape such deception? In the same chapter, 2nd Thessalonians 2 where he speaks of this deception in the first few verses he says the way to escape it is subtly written here. He's going to come with all the deception of wickedness. Activity of Satan, verse 9, 2nd Thessalonians 2, 9 deception of wickedness, verse 10 and this will be for those who perish.

And why do they perish? It's a very important phrase. Because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. Saved from what? Not from hell, but from sin.

Jesus came to save his people from their sins. And for this reason, which reason? They did not receive the love of the truth to be saved from sin. Therefore God himself will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false.

Our lusts are deceitful, it says in Ephesians 4. Satan is a deceiver, it says in Revelation 12. The heart is deceitful, it says in Jeremiah 17. Our lusts, our heart, the devil all trying to deceive us.

Our only hope is that God will protect us. But here it says God himself will turn around and deceive us. Then there's no hope.

We've got these three forces deceiving us. Our heart, our lusts and the devil. And on top of that, if almighty God also decides to deceive us there's absolutely no hope.

God is the source of light. And if he turns off his light it becomes darkness. We're going to be deceived.

Now whom does God allow on whom does God send this deluding influence? Those who don't receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. So there we see the secret of how to escape deception. Number one, love the truth and seek to be saved from sin.

That's it. If you love the truth and seek to be saved from sin, I can guarantee you'll never be deceived. Absolutely certain on the basis of that verse.

God will not deceive you. All these other forces may try to deceive you but God will keep on giving light to show you those deceptions. What does it mean to love the truth? First of all, when God shows you something in yourself, maybe in a meeting when you're reading the bible or in some circumstance or situation you see that you're selfish or you're proud or you're seeking your own in something just be honest and say Lord that's true.

Second, when you see something in scripture which goes contrary to what you believed all your life and you study scripture carefully and you say hey that's the truth love the truth and stand up for it even if you have to publicly acknowledge I was wrong. Love the truth. Don't seek your own honor there.

You will never be deceived. Seek to be saved from sin more than to be saved from sickness and poverty. Oh Lord save me from sin.

If you follow these two rules to love the truth about yourself and what you see in God's word and seek to be saved from sin you can be absolutely sure in the last days you will not be deceived. That is our only protection from satanic deception in the last days. We'll continue our study in the next episode.

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