

## Tregear Bible Talk 12<sup>th</sup> December 2021 - Matthew 23:1-24:42

It's almost Christmas. We can see more and more houses getting the lights outside. The excitements growing. Or maybe the busyness is growing. A Christmas party with workmates; trying to work out a time for all the family to get together. We want to remember, as we join together in church, that we celebrate the coming of the King. This is the biggest event in history – God coming into the world. Today, in the midst of celebrating Jesus coming into the world, we're looking at a big chunk of Matthew – 2 whole chapters.

It's a big teaching section, No 5, in chapters 23-25, Jesus has some strong words of judgement for the Pharisees but he's also looking ahead to the future and warning of what is to come. We want to be ready on Christmas Day with our presents, but far more important Jesus says here, be ready for when Jesus returns.

We're going to be reading some big chunks here. We should read the three chapters as one , but it's pretty long so we're dividing it into 2 sections. This week, warnings about the Pharisees and teachers of the law. And the signs of the future.

**23: 1-12 – read** – It's important to note here that Jesus begins on a positive note. Yes, the teachers are right to be reading out and explaining the law and the prophets, that is, the Old Testament. This is right and good. BUT, the problem in v.3 is that their lives show the exact opposite of what they are preaching. They do things for show; we have these strange little leather or parchment boxes, called phylacteries, that they wore on their arms or their foreheads [show picture]. Inside this little box were the words from 4 passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy. The idea was that you had them on your body to remind you to obey them, don't forget them.

So, one of the verses was:

*<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup> Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

So a good thing to do, but these guys are doing it to impress others around them of how religious they are. They want to be called “teacher”, literally meaning I want to be **the** teacher, the one in authority. Jesus makes it clear he himself is the one with authority to teach. God is our teacher, instructor and our Father and our Messiah. And v.11 and 12 great reminder to me or any of us who are leaders or who exercise authority in some way – be a servant, be humble – just like Jesus.

Ok, there are now a list of 7 woes, very strong words to the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

**23:13-32 – read** – Just want to highlight 3 of these woes in v.23,25 and 27. They all speak about what is in our hearts. You can look good on the outside, fool other people, but God sees what we are really like – and we need cleaning and restoration inside. Only he can do that. What a reminder to me right now. Don’t let’s fool ourselves. God wants to reveal to us what we’re like, but at the same time tell us that he accepts us just as we are. Just look at those words of Jesus in v.25-28 READ.

They’re biting words aren’t they? Yes, it’s easy to criticize and point the finger at the Pharisees; but you and I know that we can so easily be just like that. But we need to look at these words in the context of the whole of Matthew, the whole of what Jesus says. Jesus is not just saying, “Look clean you act up; be better people.” He’s saying you can’t clean yourselves up; you need a saviour. And so he calls us to come into his kingdom. To admit that we need him to clean us up; to repent. And then as we come into his kingdom the Holy Spirit works in us to convict us, to change us; to help us recognise what we’re like but also to

remember that we are loved more deeply than we can imagine by God and accepted as his children. It's like being **born again** and starting a new life with Jesus.

### **23:33-38 – read**

In the midst of these ringing words of judgement, there are the beautiful words of Jesus. “Jerusalem”, the leaders, the centre of Jewish worship which should have been honouring God and his messengers – but what does Jerusalem do – it kills the prophets and stones those sent to them. What is Jesus’ response? “How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” This picture is very powerful. There have been recorded instances of a mother hen, faced with a fire, collecting her young chickens under her wings to keep them safe. Sometimes she is successful: when the fire has done its worst and died down, you may find a dead hen with live chicks underneath its wings.

Now imagine Jesus as the hen, and his fellow-Jews , not least the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as the chickens. What is Jesus saying he wanted to do?

To answer that, you have to understand the dark and threatening paragraph that comes before these words. Jesus sees a build-up of guilt: the guilt of Israel, rejecting prophet after prophet, and stoning the people God has sent to warn them of danger. This is, of course, similar to what happens in the parables of the wicked tenant farmers and the wedding banquet (chapter 21 and 22). Behind this though, there is also the guilt of the whole human race. Jesus traces the line of blood-guilt back to the killing of Abel, the first victim of murder, killed by his brother Cain in Genesis 4. What can he mean? How can all this come upon one generation? And what does he propose to do about it?

The answer takes us, not into more denunciations, but deep into the heart of why Jesus came and Matthew’s biblical understanding of how it works. The key to it all is the way in which throughout the Bible Israel was called to represent the rest of the world before God. Israel,

said God to Moses at Sinai, was to be a nation of priests (Exodus 19:5,6), God's special people out of all the nations. But this was not for its own sake. Israel was to be God's special people in order to be the light of the nations.

But if the world remained rebellious and wicked – as it showed every sign of doing – what would this then mean? Isaiah, once more, came to the stunning prophetic vision that Israel, in the person of the servant of the lord, would bear in his own person the guilt and sin of everyone else. The darkness of the whole world would descend upon Israel itself, so that it might be dealt with and the world might after all have light (Isaiah 52,53).

Jesus himself, and the gospel writers as they reflected on what Jesus did on the cross, saw Jesus fulfilling this in himself. His vocation was to draw on to himself the destiny of Israel, which in turn was to be the focal point of the whole world. The world had gone against its creator, worshipping idols and behaving in destructive, and self-destructive, patterns. Israel, called to bring God's light to the world, had instead copied the world. The whole human race had played with fire; and the fire was now raging out of control. Jesus, as the mother hen, longed to gather the chickens under his wings, to take the full force of the fire on to himself and rescue the chickens from it.

But they refused. And the fire, now blazing merrily, would rage on until the generation that had seen the Emmanuel (Jesus), and had rejected his offer of rescue, had been consumed by its flames. This is not a way of saying, as the early church quickly came to say, that Jesus' death did in fact save people from the ultimate consequences of their own choices. That would come later. This is a statement of what Jesus longed to do, and of the consequences of Israel's refusing to allow him to do it.

In particular, the weight of judgement would fall on the Temple. v. 38 – “Look, your house (the Temple) is left to you desolate”, or has been abandoned; in many passages of the OT, the living God who had promised to live in the Temple in Jerusalem warns that persistent sin

among his people will result in the withdrawal of his presence, leaving the Temple desolate, defenceless against enemy attack. That is what Jesus is now predicting.

The final sorrowful saying in v.39 makes it clear that the messianic blessings that Jesus longed to bring to Israel can only be received by those who welcome him in faith. Even today, “Blessed is the one who comes” is the regular Hebrew way of greeting. The point is that the only way to profit from what Jesus is about to do is to speak with true understanding the words which the Palm Sunday crowds sang.

The saying haunts us. Are we really welcoming the true Jesus, the one who denounces evil and then takes it upon himself in the final great act of love? Or are we, like Israel, like Jerusalem, “welcoming” Jesus, but only as long as he fits into our agenda? Is he our true king? Of everything?

BREAK – SONG -

**Read 24: 1-3 –**

As we come to chapter 24 I want you to notice Jesus now goes out of the Temple, he leaves the Temple. He tells the disciples that the Temple will be destroyed. This place, which was the centre of worship for the Jews, will be no more. Jesus is now the centre of worship, he is in a very real sense, our Temple. As we put ourselves back into this time we need to remember what were the disciples thinking. The big questions in this chapter are: when is the Temple to be destroyed? When will Jesus be seen as the Messiah? When will the present age be brought to its close? So let’s read on. Thanks Daph

**Read 24:4-42 –**

Ok very quickly, a few things we can note here:

1. Jesus is coming again. He is returning to reign. History is moving towards that day. The world won't be blown up by a nuclear holocaust; or an environmental disaster. We will see Jesus return. He is bringing about a full restoration of everything – there will be a new heaven and a new earth; no more of those disasters spoken about like wars, famines, earthquakes etc.
2. Jerusalem will fall. That's what all the stuff in v.15-20 is about. This happened in AD70. If you want to know more about this I can tell you more about the history side.
3. Everyone wants to know what are the signs. Well, it's not very clear here is it? Jesus doesn't really answer this question. And I would suggest don't bother with reading stuff written by people who try to tell you, "Arh, this means that the end is near. This global warming is the beginning of the end – although it's a bit hard to believe in global warming these last 2 months. Global freezing more like it.
4. Jesus' coming will be sudden and unexpected. So the message is BE READY. Only God the Father knows the time, not even Jesus knows. So forget about listening to people who try to tell you that it will be in 2000 or 2022 or 2034 or whenever.

Next week, chapter 25 – 5 parables about being ready. That's what I want to leave you with.

We know how Jesus has rescued us like a hen, dying for us, saving us. Jesus' words come to us with an urgency, "Come to me. Repent, come into my kingdom." Be ready for when I return.

As we celebrate Jesus' first coming this Christmas let's be ready for his second coming

Prayer