

Lesson 23. . . Jesus Laments Over Jerusalem
Gospel of Matthew



Notes From the Podium
By Fr. Matthew Kauth

***These notes are intended to augment your own reading and study of the lesson.
Please use as an aid to help document the main message of the lecture.***

Matthew 23:1-39

I. Moving Closer to the Crucifixion

- A. We look to the end of this chapter for our Lord's incredible words of love, "that I would have gathered you under my wings".
 - 1. He uses the image of a hen gathering the chicks, protecting its children.
 - 2. All of those who would be faithful and who would be gathered by Him, are going to be found underneath His wings as they're stretched out on the cross.
- B. There will be suffering in this Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, but that suffering is gathered under the shadows of the cross.
- C. In this chapter our Lord is attempting to rouse the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes and any who would not be gathered.
 - 1. Called but not Chosen
 - a. It is a dual action: first there is the calling and gifting but there must also be receiving in order to become a member of the elect.
 - b. St. Peter describes those who are chosen as a chosen race, a royal priesthood.
 - 2. One must die with him, to live with him.
- D. There is an intensity of desire of our Lord that infuses this entire chapter and reading the end first helps us to see the end in the beginning and all through.

II. "Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples..."

- A. At the close of chapter 22, our Lord asked a question and by virtue of His question, no one was able to ask Him anything further.
- B. So often we see in the Gospel of Matthew our Lord responding to questions but in this case, he's now going to speak about those who would refuse Him.
 - 1. "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat;"
 - a. The seat of authority
 - b. "a cathedra" - root word of "cathedral", where the bishop sits, on the seat of his authority.
 - 2. "so practice and observe whatever they tell you,"
 - a. They have authority.
 - b. He Himself has given it to them.
 - 3. "but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice."
 - a. They are not fathers, they're vested with the authority of a father but they don't live as a father.
 - i. They don't feed, care for or protect their children.
 - ii. They don't assist their children to get into the kingdom.
 - iii. They do just the opposite of what a good father does, they do not give life but rather they consume it.
 - b. The eternal Father gives life to His Son.

- i. He eternally delights in the Son, but that delight is not consuming.
 - ii. In order for the Father to delight in the Son, the Son must remain the Son, and for the Son to delight in the Father, the Father must remain the Father.
 - c. The Nature of Love
 - i. Love doesn't consume, it wants the other person to be other and yet delights in them as other.
 - ii. The moment we begin to make someone to be like us they cease to be themselves and cease to be objects of love.
 - iii. Contrast to the nature of corrupt fatherhood.
- 4. "They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear and lay them on men's shoulders;"
 - a. (the word for burden here refers to something like a ship's cargo)
 - i. Ironically our Lord will allow them to lay the burden of the sins of the world upon His shoulders in the form of the cross which He willfully desires to take up carry.
 - b. "...but they themselves will not move them with their finger."
 - i. More hyperbole: this massive weight and they wouldn't even give a finger to assist with that weight.
 - ii. What kind of fatherhood/authority are they demonstrating?
- 5. "They do all their deeds to be seen by men; 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,"
 - a. Recall our Lord's instruction on fasting: do not blow trumpets, wash our face, comb our hair, etc...
 - i. By living for the praise of men, we steal the glory of God and He is the one who is to receive all glory.
 - ii. By living for the praise of men, we're attempting to live by consuming their substance, their praise.
 - iii. We should want to be pleasing to the Father.
 - b. "phylacteries" - the word originally comes from a word for defense.
 - i. The "tefillin" – small leather boxes that contain parchment inscribed with 4 verses from the Torah regarding the "tefillin".
 - Deuteronomy, 6:4-8 (The Shamah)
 - Deuteronomy 11:13-21:
 - Exodus 13:1-10:
 - Exodus 13:11-16:
 - ii. These "tefillin" (boxes of prayers) are worn during morning prayers.
 - They are defenses
 - They are reminders of their covenant with God and of where their hearts should be.
 - iii. How perverse to take the very thing that is supposed to be their defense and *against* trying to please to men, and use them as a show.
 - c. He's not condemning the externality of the faith, he's condemning the heart becoming external to the man.
 - i. Those external manifestations help us because we're body and soul, not just spirits.
 - ii. But when we live on the outside of ourselves we have an empty tomb, with no one inside.

6. "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your Father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven."
 - a. Again how precious the word "Father" is to our Lord.
 - b. St. Paul reminds us that all fatherhood on earth derives its name from the Father in heaven, not vice versa.
 - c. It is not the word He is condemning.
 - i. Our Lord talked about father Abraham
 - ii. St. Paul speaks about fathers of the churches
 - d. The tradition of calling priests "father" is done with the understanding that a father in the church is only a father because he's not giving his own life to beget life, but is generating life from the Father, by virtue of the sacraments.
 - i. A father in the church is a father only to the extent that he manifests and does the work of the eternal Father.
 - ii. A father is just an image of our one Father, for we only have one Father just as a priest is only a priest in the one priesthood of Christ.
 7. "He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."
 - a. Recall the "alpha and omega" rhyme scheme.
 - b. The Magnificat
- C. "But woe to you..."
1. "Hypocrites!" You shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in."
 - a. He calls them hypocrites six times and adds a seventh for perfection meaning that they are full of hypocrisy.
 - b. Hypocrisy means that you are not what you appear to be, as if were wearing a mask.
 - c. We can be all sorts of things to different people, the question is, does our face manifest the reality of our heart and mind, or is it something that is at odds with our heart and mind.
 - d. Such duplicity is the fracturing of the human person.
 2. "You shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in." - They create their own kingdom.
 3. Blind Guides
 - a. A blind guide cannot see for the mask he wears, and yet tries to lead others.
 - b. They adjust the rules of the oath depending on the desire. If someone made an oath but they didn't want to be bound by it, they just changed that oath to suit them so that their oaths mean nothing.
 - c. St. Thomas Moore, A Man for all Seasons, -"When you take an oath, you hold your soul in your hands and if you break that oath, you open up your fingers and your soul runs through them and is lost."
 - d. The Covenant Oath (To "seven" oneself)
 - e. "...you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters"
 - i. Herbs were so small as not a matter to be tithed.
 - ii. They go out of your way to even tithe this insignificant and lightest of matter and yet neglect all the weightier matters.
 - iii. They betray their word, and do not give over the sheep to the Father, only herbs, lighter matters, and

- iv. They neglect “the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”
 - f. “You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!”
 - i. Wine was often poured through linen because gnats would get in it. (This is the same reason that priests put a pall on the chalice.)
 - ii. Gnats were considered unclean by Jews and so they would strain the wine to make sure they didn’t eat a gnat, but they didn’t mind swallowing a camel.
 - iii. They strain out the smallest matter while consuming a camel and don’t even notice it.
- D. “...you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity.”
1. Contrast this with the internal purification that is taking place in us by virtue of grace.
 - a. Our Lord has not come to make our bodies beautiful, not in this life.
 - b. Our Lord has not come to make our actions look as if they are worthy, not in this life.
 - c. He has come to regenerate us from the inside out.
 2. He sends the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that He might dwell *in* us, and begin the transformation from the inside out.
 - a. The cup first is filled with pure choice wine and then the cup itself, the outside, becomes clean.
 - b. But first the cup will decay and ultimately die, but the internal life will be what regenerates the external life such that the glorified body will have a perfect resemblance to the transformed soul.
 3. “... first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean.
- E. Woe to you, ... for you are like whitewashed tombs,”
1. In the months before Passover, tombs were washed with lime.
 - a. A dead body was buried where it was; there were tombs all around.
 - b. To touch a tomb made one unclean and unable to participate in the Passover.
 - c. At Passover, millions came to Jerusalem, so tombs were whitewashed so that they could be easily spotted and avoided.
 2. Our Lord is remarking about the brilliance of stone that is washed in lime, and is comparing the Scribes and Pharisees to these white patches.
 - a. Everyone sees how brilliantly white they are.
 - b. Yet they are only something that makes other men unclean.
 - c. They are like dead men in tombs.
 3. Don’t forget the one who is speaking here is the one who can make us rise from tombs.
 - a. He will make any tomb that receives Him as the tomb which received Him after His death, filled with a new life.
 - b. He desires do this for them.
 - i. Hence in calling them blind guides, He is asking them to let Him be their guide; He is the only one who knows the way.
 - ii. He is the only one who has seen the Father.

III. “Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.”

- A. Christ lays down a challenge to them to continue the work of their fathers who killed the prophets by killing Him.

1. His blood will fill up the cup of all of those that He sent before until it is overflowing.
 2. Look at the book of Revelation and see the blood that runs waist high through the streets, “fill up the measure”.
- B. That challenge fulfilled would also be our salvation.
- IV. “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?”
- A. Here He begins speaking in the first person because He is God and no one notices.
1. He says, “Therefore I send you prophets,” (He is the one who sent them and knows what they did to them)
 2. “That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth... Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation.”
 3. In AD 70, just 40 years later it did come upon them in the destruction of the temple Jerusalem.
- B. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,... How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”
1. A revelation of a Father’s love.
 2. The Father after sending all of these prophets now sending His Son.
 3. The desire of a true father, to give life even the life of His Son, for He so loved the world that He sent His only Son that we might have life.
- C. “Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”
1. We heard this before when He came into Jerusalem in Chapter 21.
 2. We hear it in the Sanctus, the great Hallel, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”
 3. When he offers Himself, it is the most perfect revelation of the Father to those under the wings of the cross.
 - a. That’s why the centurion can look up and say, “truly this was the Son of God”.
 - b. Never before was there a revelation of the Father more perfect than the love displayed by the Son.