

Woes from the Prophet King (Matthew 23:1-39)

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[0 : 00] And now I will also be reading for us the Bible verse today. Let us prepare our hearts to receive the word of God.

A warning against hypocrisy. Sorry. Seven. Yeah. A warning against hypocrisy. Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy cubistome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

Everything they do is done for people to see. They make their polarities wide and the tassels on their garments long. They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues.

They love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called rabbi by others. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.

[1 : 18] And do not call anyone on earth father, for you have one father, and he is in heaven. Not are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah.

The greatest among you will be your servant, for those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Seven woes on the teachers of the law and the Pharisees.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and the Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

Woe to you, blind guides! You say, if anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing. But anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.

[2 : 22] You blind fools! Which is greater, the gold or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, if anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing.

But anyone who swears by the altar is bound by the oath. You blind men! Which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it, and by everything on it. And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it, and by the one who dwells in it.

And anyone who swears by the heavens swears by God's throne, and by the one who sits on it.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and the Pharisees! You hypocrites!

You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill, and cumin, but you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

[3 : 17] You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat, but swallow a camel. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees!

You hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will also be clean.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.

In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. Woe to you, teachers of the law and the Pharisees!

You hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.

[4 : 27] You testify against yourselves and that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead then, and complete what your ancestors started. You snakes!

You broder vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore, I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify.

Others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who killed the prophets and stoned those who sent you, stoned those sent to you.

How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. And you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.

[5 : 29] For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. That's the word of the Lord. Thank you, Irene, for reading that.

Good afternoon, PCBC. And for those who don't know me, my name is William. I'm one of the pastors here. And it is a privilege to bring the preaching of God's word to us today.

This is a tough passage, isn't it? All right? Long chapter, but also confronting. So let us ask God to help us to hear from this part of his word.

So let's focus our hearts and minds now as we pray to God. Lord, we ask for your help because we are sinners in need of a savior.

We are minds that are distracted by looking right before others. And yet here we're confronted with the fact that we cannot be right on our own strength.

[6 : 36] So help us to face up to any hypocrisy in us. Help us to lament for any unrepentant hearts in us. Help us to pursue humility as we have heard from the Lord Jesus.

We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. It's become as simple as a tap of the button. What you can do these days is you pick a body and a face.

And then you'll use AI, right? And it will help you create a realistic photo with the body of one person and the face of another. Who's tried AI on, you know, face swapping on themselves?

Someone else? Yeah? Results may vary, right? So it depends on the program you use. Sometimes the results are comical. So there's one guy that went into the British Museum and just did some face swaps with some of the things he came across.

A bit of a masterpiece. But then sometimes it gets really, really devastating. Like the French woman who was convinced that she was dating Brad Pitt.

[7 : 42] Because someone, a scammer, had used AI to convince her that she was dating Brad Pitt using the face swapping strategy. Well, in our passage today, in this chapter, Jesus is condemning a spiritual kind of face swapping.

So we'll go to the next slide. And he's condemning this face swapping in a sense that has choked God's people from all spiritual life.

As we heard Irene read that passage, what do you think Jesus' mood or attitude is? Who thinks he's happy? No one. Who thinks he's a bit upset? Yeah?

I think so. All right? You can tell he's upset. You can tell he is feeling strong emotions. To badly paraphrase a Billy Joel song, this is the Lord kind of almost singing, woe, woe, woe, woe for the longest time.

Here at PCBC English, we don't want to skip the hard bits of Scripture. Even though it would be very tempting to go, ah, this doesn't sound like a very positive message.

[8 : 50] Let's skip to the next chapter. But at the same time, it is a puzzle, isn't it? Why does God preserve 39 verses of warning and judgment?

Not even on us directly, on these scribes and Pharisees. How can that be relevant for us today? And yet I want to suggest this is one of the clearest windows into what is God's heart towards spiritual leaders who mislead and mistreat vulnerable people.

What is His heart against those people? This is the Lord Jesus, right? He's standing up for His bride, the church that He loves. He's standing up against the hypocrisy, the evil that is in some leaders.

Now, unlike us, Jesus' fury and anger is holy. It's directed in the right way, in the right measure. And it comes from someone who is sinless. I think we need this chapter, Matthew 23, because all of us here have been scarred or have witnessed people being scarred by two-faced leaders before. [10:07] I don't know each of your stories. Maybe you're here and you have had a bad and awful experience over someone in church leadership. And even if you haven't experienced it personally, maybe you will one day.

Or maybe you know the feeling when you see on the news, oh, look, church leaders doing awful things. Matthew 23 is God's word for us in these moments.

But I think we also need this chapter because all of us in some way fall into the same dangers as the Pharisees did. I don't think it's just religious leaders in Jerusalem who struggle with hypocrisy, right?

We do too, don't we? We wrestle with the gap between who we say we are, right? Upstanding Christian, church family on mission together, and how we actually live when God fades into the background through the week.

Matthew 23, again, is God's word for us as well. And this is a hard passage because, look, here's a pastor preaching about bad leadership.

[11:19] It's a dangerous task. I read this chapter this week, and I'm so aware of my own failures, my own sinful tendencies, or my past and present mistakes.

This is an opportunity for all of us to reflect and repent before Jesus, our prophet and our king. And I want to encourage you to take the opportunity to do the same here as well.

So remember the context. Where are we? We're still in the temple courts, right? We've been here for a little bit. And this is the day after Jesus has marched in to Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday.

Here in the midst of the crowds is God in the flesh, the Lord Jesus, right? Actually, the verse before the start of chapter 23 that Irene read, the verse before reminds us no one could say a word in reply to Jesus, right?

He had been showing his authority as the Messiah, God's promised king. He has proved himself to be the very Lord that King David prophesies in Psalm 110.

[12:27] And this promised Lord, he's giving his final sermon, as it were, here in the temple walls. There's a storm coming. The Passover festival's approaching.

Something big is about to happen in a couple of days. And so every last word matters from the Lord Jesus. And this is a long passage, but I want to suggest that there are three main things that Jesus teaches in his final sermon.

Three main things that he does. So those are our three points today. The first thing that Jesus does is that he faces self-centered leaders with humble obedience.

We see this in verses 1 to 12, right? The teachers of the law, he says to the crowds and disciples. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you, but don't do what they do, for they do not preach.

Practice what they preach. We need to understand how astonishing Jesus' accusations are here, all right?

[13:32] Notice in the verse, he's not saying, don't do what robbers and criminals and lowlifes do. No. He's talking to the crowds and disciples. He says, don't do what these well-respected people do.

He's taking aim at people who are respected in society. People who are looked up to. People who try to imitate these leaders. And yet Jesus says, don't practice what they do.

He's exposing them for being power-hungry parasites. He's revealing that they make religious demands. They place unbearable expectations on people's shoulders with a different way of living that is all about rules.

You notice how in verse 5, he specifically points out how everything these leaders do is for outward appearances. They dress to impress with long fringes, widened phylacteries.

A phylactery is like a box in Jewish culture where they would have a box, they wear it, and in it they put a little scroll that had God's word. The original point was to remind you to pray.

[14:40] But what they would do is just make these boxes bigger and bigger. That doesn't help you pray more. It just helps people see that you want to pray more. Everything was done for other people to see, according to these Pharisees.

If the Pharisees had social media accounts, they'd be the ones endlessly reshooting their reels and videos until it was just right. Doing everything for others to see. They'd be the ones forever bragging about what they do before others.

Maybe talking about people, name dropping them just to feel their sense of self-worth. Where in our memory verse, Jesus reminds us, love God, love your neighbor as yourself.

Here were people who loved their faces at the center of the group photos. They loved hearing others greet them out and about with honors and titles.

You know, Rabbi, Rabbi, you're so amazing. Please note, Jesus is not criticizing all religious people here. He's countering those who live for the praise of others.

[15 : 48] He's saying, look, if that's you, if that's your heart, there's no eternal reward. And look, rightly or wrongly, these scribes, these Pharisees, these fallen leaders, they were given Moses a seat.

And what that means is that they were given the role of teaching and interpreting God's instructions and laws. Did you notice in verse 3, Jesus says to his disciples, You should still respect the office they hold.

You should still do what they tell you. Just don't do what they actually do. Because I think as humans we can run into extremes, can't we?

When you love your pastor or leader, you can be tempted to idolize them. Alright? If you have a leader that you respect a lot, you'll just copy everything they do. You might idolize the life that they are living.

But on the flip side, if you're very disappointed with your leader, whoever they are, it can be tempting then to be just cynical about anything that came from their mouth or their lies.

[16 : 54] It could be that anything they taught you, you now question and doubt. Jesus warns the crowds to avoid the fruit of selfish living, yet he still tells them to latch on to the true word of God, no matter who teaches it to them.

And even in the face of disappointing leadership, you and I, we're not, Jesus doesn't give us the permission to give up on God's word and his teaching. We're still to stay armed with the sword of the spirit, God's word.

And notice in verse 8 to 12, Jesus gives us the proper response, right? What do you do when you've been hurt by leaders, either now or in the past?

Have you been stung by self-centered leadership? We live in a culture that is very happy to criticize, bring down leaders, cancel them. We perhaps live in a church culture that is okay with just whispering about them or taking them down or ignoring them.

Jesus, though, in verse 8 to 12, rightly challenges them. He says, As for you, look, just focus on your master in heaven. You've got one master and you're all brothers.

[18 : 09] As for you, call upon your father in heaven. You've got one father. Listen to him. You've got one teacher, the Messiah. Listen to him. Let him instruct you.

That's how we're to respond. That's how we're to measure our greatness, through how we humbly listen to the Lord Jesus. In the kingdom of heaven, if you want to be great, don't aim to rule the church.

Aim to serve the church. As Jesus has said in the past, Blessed are the humble, the meek, but they shall inherit the land.

Humility doesn't come easily to us. We are a people who like to build ourselves up. We are born in sin, and so we naturally want to make ourselves look good.

Humility, true humility, can only come from the gospel, from when we truly know the good news that Jesus, the one who had everything, humbled himself, humbled himself even to death on a cross for you.

[19 : 13] If you know that good news, if that's changed your heart, that's where we can start to draw from, and we ourselves can become this humble nature, natured servant.

That's a solution, isn't it? There's an empty way of life, when we just live for other people's praises. The solution against that kind of empty way of living is to turn to live for God's praise.

Jesus invites us to walk with him in humble obedience. I think that's what we see in the first couple of verses. If you're like me, you might feel very uncertain what to make of the next section of chapter 23, right?

This is where Jesus seems to face spiritual hypocrisy, and he faces it with prophetic judgment. Make no mistake, this is sustained, long criticism.

He's criticizing, in essence, the senior pastors of Jerusalem. And did you notice the strong language, right? Jesus calls them what? Snakes? What else?

[20 : 22] A brood of vipers? Lawless? We hear the word hypocrites many times. Blind guides? We're not used to hearing strong language like that. Who would ever talk about our senior pastors like this, right?

Jesus is calling out with authority. Jesus is tough on tyrants, just as much as he is tender with his children.

This section mirrors, actually, Jesus' earlier teaching. He taught in Matthew chapter 5 to 7, and he taught the crowds, and he said, blessed are the poor in spirit.

Do you remember that section, the Beatitudes? And so, that section, he's, in a sense, saying, good on you, all these people who are poor in spirit. Here, when he says, woe to you, it's as if he's saying, I'm so sorry for you.

That's what he's doing here. Right? How many times does he say, woe? At least seven in our chapter. And in declaring seven woes, he's basically saying seven times, I'm so sorry for you.

[21 : 26] You who do all these things, opposite to what a teacher, a leader should be. And Jesus has the authority to proclaim woes on the Pharisees and leaders, because he is the true prophet and king.

He has unsurpassed authority. In his tone and manner, actually, he's kind of channeling the heart of Old Testament prophets, people like Amos or Ezekiel.

They were called by God to preach judgment, okay, on disobedient people of God. So Jesus is kind of doing the same thing. He's actually proving his authority to do that, even as he criticizes, even as he declares judgment on these spiritual hypocrites.

Right? And did you notice verse 34? It says, therefore, I am sending you prophets. Did you notice that detail? Jesus is saying, I send them. He's claiming authority that only God has.

Right? Who gets to send prophets and people will speak for God? Only God does. Jesus is saying no less than the fact that he is God. He has God's authority. He's going to send forth messengers of his word, declaring judgment on those who resist him.

[22 : 41] Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. hypocrites. The word hypocrite has its own meaning today as English speakers. But this word was originally used to refer to an actor in a play.

Right? So this word comes from ancient Greek. And this kind of actor was someone who would play a part in a stage drama. Right? So some of you know that in the past in PCBC people loved to do skits.

So imagine someone who played in a skit. But these actors, you know, in these plays there'd just be a few actors who played many, many different parts.

And so literally a hypocrite, okay, the original meaning is someone who would play lots of different parts in a play and they would have to change faces, right, depending on which part they were playing.

They were the original face swappers in a sense. Can you get the picture here? By calling someone a hypocrite, these teachers, Jesus is saying more than just you don't practice what you preach.

[23 : 48] He's saying your life is an act. Your life is an act. You're just playing a role on a stage. You're not claiming.

You're not who you truly claim to be. In fact, you never were. You're just performing in a sense. That's the criticism. You're just changing faces depending on where you are and who you're with. That hurts, doesn't it, to be accused like that? No wonder they want to crucify him, but does the shoe fit? Is your spiritual life just an act?

That's a criticism here. Jesus has actually talked about hypocrisy as well before. Again, we go back to the Sermon on the Mount and in chapter 6 of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is preaching.

He calls out all those people who pretentiously practice religious works. All right? Inconsistent, insecure people who pray for show.

[24 : 51] They pray long prayers so that other people can hear them and think how holy they are. They donate or give to the needy, but they do it in a way that everyone can see them. Or they fast, right?

They go without food or something, and they do it in a way that makes them look so miserable that others will see, oh, they're so spiritual. Hypocrites. It's just an act.

And here in Matthew 23, Jesus is taking closer aim, doesn't he? Right? Woe after woe, he rebukes them. He's very specific in how their religious life is an act.

For example, there's leaders, verse 15, who, sorry, verse 15, who travel land and sea to find a convert only to make them worse with loading them with man-made religion.

Imagine flying all the way to Vanuatu and then telling them, just do more good things. That's how you'll be right with God. You hypocrites. Or verse 16 to 22, leaders who make complicated promises, all right, without simply loving God and loving their neighbor.

[26 : 01] Hypocrites. Or further on, leaders with confused priorities. They care for little insects rather than a big animal like a camel, right? Or verse 23, 24, they're obsessed with all these man-made laws right down to what cooking herbs to give to God, while at the same time neglecting justice, mercy, and faithfulness in their lives.

Hypocrites. Leaders who look washed and polished on the outside, and yet inwardly are full of death and decay. So sorry for you. Again, please note, Jesus is not condemning every single first-century Jewish person here.

Matthew has actually introduced lots of righteous people, both Jewish and non-Jewish, through his gospel. But remember who's listening to this, right? What does verse 1 say?

Jesus said to the crowds, and what does it say in your Bibles? And to his disciples. He is the audience, you see? In condemning the Pharisees, he's actually doing it in the presence of the crowds and the disciples, so that they will hear this critique, and then they will also listen to the instruction.

You see, in condemning the Pharisees, actually at the same time teaching his followers, including us, his disciples, don't play act the faith like these guys.

[27 : 28] It will bring woe, not blessing to you. It is doomed to failure, not flourishing. It will lead to your death and destruction if you live like this. And spoiler alert, we will see, it certainly will when someone play acts the faith.

And there's a particular disciple who even betrays Jesus a few chapters later. Please also note, this is a very tough chapter, but nowhere in this chapter does Jesus teach us to then point the finger at so-and-so for their faith or their lack of faith.

Please note that only Jesus, the Lord Jesus, gets to condemn, not us. If you are listening to this and thinking, ah, I think I know a few people who are hypocrites, please don't.

That's not what it's for. Rather, I think Jesus rebukes the Pharisees. Why? So that his disciples who are listening might actually look in the mirror, that we might look in the mirror.

We might ask the hard questions of ourselves. Right? Who are among the disciples? People like Peter, John, James, right? They're all being preemptively warned by Jesus, this is the wrong kind of leadership.

[28 : 46] It's woeful. It must be avoided in my new kingdom. While these words of judgment were not written to us, they're written for us as well.

And so we need to, as we listen to Jesus, denounce the Pharisees, we are also meant to look in the mirror and ask, am I, perhaps, guilty of the same heart problems as these Pharisees?

Is there any play-acting in my faith? Can I suggest three questions you can ask yourselves, actually, and I've been asking myself. These are hard questions. Hard question one, does my behavior align with my beliefs?

Right? Some of you from a young age can rattle off the gospel story. Jesus died for my sins. Right? It's easy to assume then, therefore you're godly, because you know that story, or that you've read the Bible, or you know it all, or that you've been at church for a certain length of time.

Do my behaviors align to my beliefs, though? Pastor Murray Mishane once said, my people's greatest need is my holiness. Do I set an example for others in my speech, my conduct, my faith, my love, and purity?

[30 : 00] That's what 1 Timothy 4.12 tells us. Yes, the Bible says you and I, we're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone. And the Bible also says that this faith, it won't just sit there alone.

Every genuine Christian will, because of this faith, end up growing and maturing in Christ in some way. Is that true for you? Do your behaviors more and more become shaped and changed by your

beliefs?

Another hard question you can ask, am I burdening others with unnecessary requirements? Am I burdening others with unnecessary requirements? Jesus is different, right?

He tells us in Matthew's gospel, his yoke is easy, his burden is light, he offers rest for our souls. So if you and I, we follow after Jesus, we must be careful not to then lay unnecessary, heavy burdens on people in order that they would come to him.

We have to be careful that we don't slip into sayings like to be a Christian you must dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, and add something in. To really belong at PCBC you must meet this standard, you must dress this way, you must do these kinds of things.

[31 : 16] We want to be careful not to be so busy watching for the tiny details of each other's lives that we miss what true Christianity really should be. People who live out the gospel, people who are sorry for their sin and keep trusting Jesus and who teach each other to do that.

Hard question number three, right? Am I building a church that's just for show? And again, we can rely on some of the imagery that we see here.

Imagine offering a cup to someone. Here's a drink, right? It's a cup of coffee that we just brewed.

Look, the cup's washed on the outside, we say, but you look inside the cup and it's got dirt and gunk and even mold.

Jesus says that was what the Jewish religion had become for Israel. We want to be careful not to offer that as a Christian church today.

And it can be what we offer if we focus our time and attention on the externals without actually prioritizing what's going on in people's hearts, right?

[32 : 27] It's easy to try and make church attractive on the outside without caring and investing deeply into how people are really going on the inside. Biblical Christianity actually is inwards before it's outwards.

We are shaped far more deeply by unseen habits of reading God's word, delighting in him in prayer, sharpening one another to keep trusting Jesus internally.

That will then flow into new life in Christ. That will then change what we look like on the outside. It starts in here first. A tight Sunday production might draw a crowd to church but look, believers who are just faking it, it will drain a church from any true life.

Prayerless people will poison even a good looking church on the outside from being truly spiritually fruitful. It's so easy, isn't it, to let externals take center stage, to work on what things look like on the outside without saying, hey, how's your heart going?

Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart and we should too. And if you and I, we need help with this, we can look to Jesus for help. We see his ability to replace selfish leadership with humble obedience.

[33 : 50] We see Jesus and his authority to denounce spiritual play-acting with prophetic judgment over those things.

And finally, in our last few verses, we actually see Jesus' heart ache, don't we? As we see in the last few verses, Jesus facing stubborn unbelief with tender compassion.

Listen again to how he ends the chapter. He says this, O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you weren't willing.

After all these woes, you might think, Jesus, he's a bit heartless, or he's a bit cruel, he's a bit of a meanie, but no. Can you see?

His heart here. Can you see how he looks at this city that is rejecting him with eyes of compassion? He's lamenting, he's grieving over their unbelief.

[34 : 56] He's still longing to shelter them under his wings, using this imagery, this wonderful picture of a mother hen looking after the little birds in her care. love. Here's a powerful reminder, isn't it?

God hates hypocrisy. He does. Yet he still longs to heal them. Like a loving parent, God laments as they reject his grace time and time again, he still wants them to repent, to come to him.

This is God's gracious heart. This is the goodness of God, as we sang before. This is how he deals with us. The God of the Bible is a God who extends love to a city that is rebelling against him.

The God of the Bible is one who patiently waits to see how people respond, gives them a chance. He doesn't force people, he doesn't manipulate people to come to him.

He pleads with them. He grieves over them. We see the same heart of God when he offers the gospel, do we not?

[35 : 59] Don't we? Every Christian, whether you admit it or not, is an enemy of God. Sorry, every person is an enemy of God. And every Christian is an enemy of God who has been transformed to be a friend of God by the grace of God.

And God extends this offer of forgiveness to all who believe and trust him. And you can even trust him today. That's the heart of God willing to give you a chance, willing that you would turn and repent and believe in the Son of God.

And yet this compassion, this patience will one day end. As this verse reminds us, it ends one day for these people.

They run out of chances. And soon Jesus comes as a judge, does he not? Every day that we have here is patience means salvation.

But soon he comes as a judge where everyone must bow the knee to him. Where one day even Jesus' enemies will say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. So much of Jesus' final words here, right, in his final sermon, it just seems at odds with the spirit of our age, right?

[37 : 19] We struggle with this. We tell ourselves, you do you. We tell ourselves, be yourself. It's not what Jesus preaches. But let me share in closing just a few reflections from this chapter.

I've got three short reflections. First, one observation that I have in mind is this. Even when leaders fail, it doesn't prevent us from obeying God.

We want to let him judge, right? Live long enough in the church and you will come across all kinds of people who said they were Christians and then they gave up, they lost their way, they turned away or something.

You may even know some of them. They may even be people who have walked through this church. But high profile ones are always in the news. I remember one time when a worship artist that I really loved, Derek Webb, announced he was no longer a Christian.

And that broke my heart. It changed actually how I heard all of the songs that he'd recorded for many, many years that he's saying in earnest faith. Whenever a spiritual authority kind of changes face as it were, it can be really disappointing.

[38 : 33] Maybe it can feel like, oh, wow, if that's what happens even with the best of Christians, is it safer to just throw out everything they've taught? But please remember, God will be tough on hypocrites us, while not abandoning his truth.

When there is spiritual abuse, when there is hypocrisy, that's a failure with the person, not the message itself. I want to encourage you, don't hold on to your hopes on the leader that taught you God's word.

Rather, keep holding on to the word, the biblical truth, regardless of who taught it to you and what happens to that person. Jesus still calls us in this passage to obey the teaching of these leaders, even if not their actions.

Second observation, leaders will fail more than we can fix. Leaders will fail more than we can fix. Been to this church five years, some of you have been to this church longer.

Stay in church long enough and you will have a front row seat to lots of disappointing moments with leaders. You might meet a respected leader, and they might have walked away from the Lord.

[39 : 44] You might hear of a big-name preacher and they're caught in moral failure, they're disqualified from ministry through what they've done. You might even hear or experience the sadness of a pastor who walks away from the faith.

And look, when these things happen, you and I might try to take matters into our own hands, try and do something different only to feel powerless that nothing has changed. Leaders will fail more than we can fix in our own strength.

And Jesus says, we don't have to deal with it all. Let him be the one who judges. He takes ownership over the problem, doesn't he, in this chapter. Be encouraged.

Jesus cares deeply about these failures and hypocrisies. I mean if you can't do anything about it. At his second coming, he will tear down every unfruitful tree.

he will raise up every true child of God. And when he does this, he's not clear, he's not 100% crystal clear, and actually next week, in the next chapter, he goes on to discuss, right, because his disciples say, when all these things happen, and we'll hear more about that.

[40 : 56] But he will sort it all out. And finally, I've been just so struck by the fact that we perform, we play act more than we admit, don't we?

We play act and we perform more than we admit. One of the most difficult things to notice is when your faith has become routine, it's become a bit of a show.

You know all the lines to say, but it's not really what's in your heart. You might be able to very eloquently say, I'll pray for you, without ever meaning to do it. Or you might be able to pass yourself up as a Christian on a Sunday while the rest of your life, God fades into the background.

It's so easy and so tempting to slip from talking to God in an intimate fatherly way to then, bit by bit, just talking to God as we were reading lines off a play or a script.

And so we need each other, we need each other to help each other, not drift that way. The more you and I go down the road of praying for others to see, rather than just for an audience of one, the more you and I start to teach things that we never want to do ourselves, the more you start looking to lead without being willing to be led yourself, the more your spiritual walk becomes dangerously like an act, a scam, a shadow.

[42 : 20] Rather, again, let's hear Jesus' words to us, whoever exalts himself will be humble, whoever humbles himself will be exalted. God's mercy is offered to hypocrites like you, hypocrites like me.

Will you turn your face to him? Will you turn away from the woeful life of fake religion? Will you submit your whole life to Jesus as Lord?

Because, praise God, our sins, our hypocrisies are many, but, praise God, his mercies are more.

Shall we pray together? Lord, we confess our unbelief, and yet we ask you to help us with our belief in you.

We come knowing that we are broken broken people, never matching up to what we claim to be.

We thank you that the blood of Christ forgives us of all our sins, including all the ways that we have play-acted our faith.

And so, help us now. Respond, not feeling the weight of condemnation, but turning to Jesus, trusting again, or maybe for the first time, in his power to save.

[43 : 53] us, to heal us, to transform us to the uttermost. We thank you so much for the good news that Christ died for our sins, and he rose again.

And that's all we need to cling to, not our good works, not our performances, not who we want others to say we are. Thank you so much, and we pray all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.