

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Lecture 16, Matthew 23-24

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 16, Matthew 23-24.

Jesus has been debating with the Pharisees and the Sadducees in public.

Well, now Jesus is going to say more specifically to his disciples and anybody else who's listening, what these Pharisees and other leaders are really about. In Matthew chapter 23, he's going to excoriate the scribes and the Pharisees. He's going to speak of impending judgment on the religious establishment, eventually talking about the temple and therefore the temple establishment.

The first coming, the Pharisees, the scribes and the temple would all be under judgment in the year 70 when Jerusalem would be destroyed and the temple would be destroyed. But Jesus is going to go on beyond this and talk about the second coming. And those warnings also mean that we take those first warnings and apply them to the religious establishment of our own day and look to ourselves.

Professed ministers who don't care for the sheep, chapter 24 verses 45 to 51, will also be judged. So, the Pharisees, it's not just something to tell us out of historical interest, well, the Pharisees messed up. It's also something to challenge ourselves, to make us look at ourselves and say, don't act like they acted.

Make sure we love God's people and serve God's people in the ways that we should. Jesus challenges religion for show. This is in the context of the Jerusalem leader's hostility.

Much of that came from Mark chapter 12 and some of this also is in Mark chapter 12. Later rabbis and some of it's also from Luke chapter 11, later rabbis condemned hypocrisy. They noted that there was hypocrisy in Israel and they condemned Pharisaic hypocrisy.

In fact, the rabbis had this tradition, you find it a number of times in their writings that are preserved for us. They had this tradition about seven different kinds of Pharisees. The only good kind of Pharisee was the kind of Pharisee who served God out of the love of God or the fear of God.

But other kinds of Pharisees served God with other kinds of motives. And so, they talked about this one kind of Pharisee called the bleeding or the bruised Pharisee.

This Pharisee walked around with his eyes closed and kept running into things and therefore bruising himself, lest he accidentally look upon a woman and lust after her.

So, there was an acknowledgment within Jewish tradition of Pharisee hypocrisy and other people's hypocrisy. I remember one time when I was horrified to find out that a particular minister was committing adultery and a member of his congregation said, where have you been? You're out of touch with the real world. God forbid if that's normal in the real world.

But there are people who are living in sin and using the Lord's name. And that was true in Jesus' day as well. And Jesus condemns the hypocrisy.

There were intra-Jewish disputes. You find them in the Dead Sea Scrolls, you find them in 4th Ezra, 2nd Baruch, and so on. And lest we think that Jesus is being very, some people have said, well, Matthew 23 is anti-Jewish.

It's not anti-Jewish. If you want to read something anti-Jewish, Josephus reports anti-Jewish slanders from Apion in his work against Apion. And Apion says all sorts of bad things about Moses, saying that the reason for the exodus was that the Jews had leprosy and Egypt just wanted to get rid of them.

He calls the Jews idolaters, and talks about worshiping an ass's head in the temple. There were all these anti-Jewish slanders. But by contrast with that, you had intra-Jewish disputes where you had some Jewish groups that were condemning some other Jewish groups.

I mean, you look at the prophets, you look at Amos, you look at Hosea. I love Hosea with the heart of God, the love of God. But Hosea, Amos, Jeremiah, and God spoke very strictly, very harshly, very firmly to his people in these books.

And you had similar kinds of rhetoric among some Jewish groups condemning other Jewish groups. The Dead Sea Scrolls basically say we are God's covenant community. We're the only remnant who are still serving God.

The rest of Israel is apostate. And they actually, in one place, I believe it's in the Qumran hymns, they call the rest of Israel the congregation of Belial, the assembly of Satan. Now that's strong language.

And that was Jewish. Well, Jesus was Jewish. Jesus is Jewish, we could say.

Jesus is Jewish, and his disciples were Jewish, and he was pronouncing judgment, no less than the prophets did. Matthew applies the leaders of the first coming, though, as a warning to us who are leaders among God's people today. Who were the Pharisees? Well, there are some debates about where the term comes from.

Probably the term means separatists. They wouldn't eat with people who didn't tithe their food first. They were known for their exact interpretations of the Torah.

Once they had held political power under Salome Alexandra, that was a couple of centuries earlier. But now the people with the political power were the Herodians and especially the Sadducees. The Sadducees, most of the members of the priestly aristocracy belong to the Sadducees.

The Sadducees have been in good with Herod the Great. So most of the Sanhedrin, probably in this period, consisted of Sadducees. Pharisees were probably a minority there, although there were some highly influential ones like Gamaliel the First.

Well, actually, Gamaliel the First. I'm just trying to think of which period that person was in. The Pharisees were influential with the people.

Of course, sometimes people don't like whoever's in power for whatever reason. But they were influential with the people. There were some of them in the aristocracy.

There were probably only about 6,000 of them in all of Judea and Galilee put together, 6,000 Pharisees. So, they're not even 1% or probably close to 1% of the entire population. Josephus is the one who gives us the figure of 6,000 and he's never one to underestimate numbers.

So, they were only one aspect of early Judaism. They're not normative Judaism. What the Pharisees do doesn't mean this is what all Jewish people do.

But they usually reflected the views of the people. That's one of the reasons that they were popular with the people. They were anti-Sadducean, but they had to work together with the Sadducees.

And we see them working together with the Sadducees against Jesus sometimes in the Gospels, occasionally. They had to work together with the Sadducees because the Sadducees needed their help with the people and the Pharisees needed the Sadducees' help when they needed to get something done politically. Jesus critiques the leaders, 23.1, and the leaders would retaliate.

This was a rhetorical challenge. This was a challenge to their honor. Overturning the tables in the temple was a challenge to the honor of the priestly elite also because they would...again, this is not all the priests.

The priestly elite actually seized the tithes that belonged to the lower priests and put a lot of them out of the priesthood in the next generation. Everybody agreed that the priestly elite was corrupt. The Pharisees agreed with that.

The people who composed the Dead Sea Scrolls agreed with that. Josephus agreed with that. And the writers of the Gospels and Acts agreed with that.

But in any case, these corrupt leaders, even if they hadn't been corrupt, it was a matter of honor. I mean, their honor was challenged by the overturning of tables in the temple, by this disruption in the temple. Their honor was challenged by the way Jesus publicly critiqued them.

They were the people who were supposed to be most respected, they felt. And the Pharisees would also...I mean, they weren't as high up as the Sadducees, but they would also view it as a rhetorical challenge. Jesus says that religious leaders must live by what they teach, verses two and three.

Well, in principle, the Pharisees certainly would agree with that. He says, those who sit in Moses's seat, hear what they say, but don't do what they do. Their ethics on paper were better than the way they always lived them out.

Now, in the Pharisaic ethics, you should be as lenient or strict with yourself as with others. But Jesus says they lay burdens on others that they wouldn't lift with one of their own fingers. What does it mean that they sat in Moses's seat? Some people have said it's this particular seat in the synagogue, in the temple.

In fact, a number of scholars have said that because archaeologists have shown that there was this particular seat of honor in a number of synagogues. The problem is that we don't know that that seat was called the seat of Moses. What we do know is that to sit in somebody's seat was often an expression of being someone's successor.

So, Jesus is speaking of the Pharisees as those who sit in Moses's seat, those who claim the role of Moses's successors. They claim to be meticulous interpreters of the law. They said that they received their traditions orally going back to Moses, even though that wasn't true, but that's what they said.

But many of their ethical principles were correct. And Jesus says you can live by those, but don't live by their example. In verse five, religious leaders must not seek marks of honor.

Well, when Greek orators classified rhetoric, one kind of speech was epideictic rhetoric. And this involved praise and blame. Here, Jesus is focusing on blame.

Self-praise was offensive in the ancient world. You had to come up with special excuses for it. But there were ways people could make themselves look good without actually saying, I'm the best.

Philosophers wore a special kind of apparel that marked them off. Apparently, the Pharisees did something like that as well. Jesus speaks of them making very conspicuous phylacteries.

Phylacteries, it's a Greek term. To fill in is the Hebrew term. Deuteronomy 6 said that you were to write God's commandments on your forehead and on your hand.

It may have meant it figuratively, but well before this period, many Jewish people had started practicing it literally, putting some commandments in a box that they would put on the head and on the hand. And also, they would put a mezuzah on the doorpost. There's nothing wrong with that.

It's a way of reminding you to keep the Torah. But the problem was that they were doing it in a conspicuous way to draw attention to how pious they were for other people to see. Jesus also speaks of making conspicuous the fringes on the four corners of their outer cloak, where they're called the tzitzit, the tassels.

They wanted everybody to see how religiously they were observing this commandment from the book of Numbers. Religious leaders must not seek honored treatment, verse 6. There was a big emphasis on seating in antiquity. Elders would get the best seats.

Some synagogues would have a raised platform, a bema, and more important people with status would sit there. In synagogues where people sat on the floor, a lot of them had benches, but in synagogues where people sat on the floor, those of higher status would get the seating that wasn't on the floor. In Greek circles, at banquets, people were often seated by rank.

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, people were definitely seated by rank, and if you stepped out of your rank, you could be in trouble. Seating by rank was just very familiar, very common. Well, don't seek the best seats for yourself.

I think of how in our churches today, sometimes we put the ministers on the platform. Well, if the ministers are doing something and it's easier to get to where everybody can see you, it serves a function. But if we're wanting that so that everyone will honor us, what does that say about our hearts? Now, sometimes you're in a church setting where people do need to be paying a bit more attention to the church leaders, and so there's a reason for it.

But if we're doing it because we want to be puffed up, that's not right. Jesus also points out in verses 7 through 11 that religious leaders must not seek honorary titles for themselves. Sages emphasized humility, but they also believed that they should receive special honors.

They also believed that the people who were passing by in the street needed to greet them first because as sages of the Torah, they needed to be respected. They needed to be treated as social superiors. That was the custom.

Rabbi literally meant my master before it ever became an official title, Rabbi so and so. It originally meant my master, which was a very respectful title to give to one's teacher. Jesus says, call no one Rabbi.

You have one master, even Christ. Jesus says, don't call anyone father. He's not talking about your dad, but he's talking about these special honorary titles that were given to rabbis.

Disciples of rabbis would call their rabbis, father. Now, I know that in some church traditions today, we call somebody father as a title, the same as we would call somebody professor or pastor. We have titles sometimes for some different professions.

But the issue in this case was that this was a title of honor that they were being looked up to, that their disciples were to treat them with the same respect they would treat their parents. Jesus says you have one teacher, even Jesus. You have one father, even God.

You are all brothers and sisters. That's not doing away with the role of teacher. Remember the scribe for the kingdom we talked about in Matthew 13.

Paul talks about teachers as a gift of the spirit. We welcome those things. The Bible says, to give honor to whom honor is due, government officials, and so on.

Give respect to the elders who lead the congregation, Paul says. All that may be true, but we who are leaders need to remember that our calling is to be servants. We should not cultivate others to respect us.

We should not seek that. When I was a pastor, it was in a congregation that I was very young and the others were young and they just called me Craig. In some circles that would be offensive.

Later I was in some other circles and I wanted people to call me Craig and they said, oh no, we can't do that. Reverend Keener. I was like, please don't call me reverend.

I am not to be revered. Only God is to be revered. Eventually, I gave up.

I couldn't convince them. My students early on would always call me Dr. Keener. But the big thing is I don't want to seek titles.

I don't want to seek honor. If people like me, hey, I'm great with people liking me. If people respect me, that's fine.

But I'm not seeking honor for myself. I'm seeking honor for the Lord. Exalting is God's business alone.

As Jesus goes on to make clear in verse 12, Jesus is echoing the language of Old Testament prophets, Isaiah 2 verses 11 and 12, 5, 15 and 16, Ezekiel 21:26, and so on. Whoever exalts themselves will be brought low, but the lowly will be exalted. Even in a banquet setting where you choose the lowest seat and you're called up higher, that's from Proverbs.

Leaders thus must be servants. That's the way leadership works in the kingdom. If God has given us a role, it's to serve his people, not to rule them.

We're going to see that very clearly in 24, 45 to 51 when we get there. People exploit the sheep for themselves, whether for their psychological needs or more often exploit them monetarily. Sometimes ministers have even exploited members of the congregation sexually.

There's something called transference psychologists talk about, where somebody is in a position of honor and the people look up to them. It's not so much the person himself, they're looking up to their role or their status, how they perceive the person. Then there's counter transference, where this person starts returning the affection.

You have to be careful. There's a difference between appropriate respect and inappropriate, and appropriate affection and inappropriate affection. Many ministers have fallen into sin and we need to be firm about that we need to help people to overcome that and to live holy lives before God because God will judge those who abuse his servants.

We're all fellow servants. We're supposed to look out for one another. Jesus goes on with woes against human religion in 23 verses 13 to 32.

Pharisaic ethics were similar to those of Jesus, but again, it's not just what your ethics are in principle. It's not just saying, Oh, I agree with everything Jesus said. We need to live like we agree with everything Jesus said.

Jesus gives seven woes here, which match the eight beatitudes. Apparently, some scribes thought that there should have been eight woes here to match the eight beatitudes in Jesus' first sermon in Matthew. The eighth, however, appears to be a textual variant.

It appears to be borrowed from Mark by some later scribes who thought it just was left out. Some religious leaders do more harm than good, verses 13 through 15. Jesus speaks of the seeking of proselytes, which was widely attested.

Tacitus, a Roman historian, complains about it. Some of the Romans were not very happy. The Jewish people were seeking proselytes, but it was something individuals did.

It wasn't like an organized missions movement. The Jewish community didn't have an organized missions movement, but people were interested in making proselytes, winning Gentile converts. That's not that that would be a bad thing.

The problem was that they were trying to make converts and they were trying to make converts like themselves with their own values and their values weren't always the right values. They didn't have the right heart. So, they were making converts for something that wasn't right.

Jesus says, twice the child of hell is yourself, which was a good Semitic way of saying twice as bound for hell as you are. Inconsistency in evaluating standards of holiness further dishonors God, verses 16 through 22. This harks back to what Jesus said already in Matthew chapter five about oaths in verses 33 and following.

23, 16 through 22, people use surrogate names to evade judgment if they accidentally break the oath. Pharisees sought to distinguish which oath phrases were actually binding. Jesus rejected this exercise as meaningless casuistry, meaningless pull, and not really understanding the heart of the law.

Any kind of oath, you're putting your honor at stake and any kind of oath ultimately invokes God. He speaks of swearing by the gold in the temple. If you swear by the gold in the temple, that makes you guilty.

That's what they said. Jesus said that, you know, whatever you're swearing by, it's the same. But they highly valued the gold in the temple, including the golden vine that we talked about earlier.

Jesus said that the scribes and the Pharisees were missing the forest for the trees. They were so intent on the details that they missed the big picture of God's message. And we can do that today.

I mean, you can sometimes, even in seminary, seminary students sometimes miss the forest for the trees. Sometimes, you know, learning Greek exegesis and you're saying, okay, this verb means this and this is the form of this noun, and so on. Well, that can all be helpful in understanding the Bible.

But merely having biblical knowledge, Pharisees had biblical knowledge. In fact, they knew a lot of the Torah better than most Christians today do. It's not enough to just have knowledge of grammar.

It's not just enough to have knowledge of the page. We should relish that. We should love that.

But being people of the book should mean more than just knowing the book. It should mean that we live the life of the spirit of the book. Matthew 23, verses 23 and following, talks about how they missed the forest for the trees.

Jesus starts off talking about tithing. Many churches today very much emphasize tithing. They quote Malachi 3:10, bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house.

And they'll say, well, you have to bring all the tithe into the church because the church is where the food is being distributed to the people. That wasn't really the point in Malachi. The storehouse was where the grain was kept.

It was the granary. And the food was then distributed to priests and Levites, not just your favorite local church ones. Now, I know this can be a very touchy subject because this is how many churches raise their support.

When John Tetzel was raising support for the building projects in Rome and Martin Luther had the audacity to challenge the readings of scripture and the readings of tradition on which that was based, the way it was being done, saying, well, if you give this, you'll get one of your relatives out of purgatory and so on. Luther said, there's no basis for that. That's wicked fundraising.

He got himself in a lot of trouble with the establishment of his day. And not wishing to get myself in a lot of trouble, perhaps I should move on to the next point. But just to say it is biblical to support the work of the church.

Jesus doesn't demand 10% probably because Jesus will not be bought off with a petty sacrifice like 10%. Jesus demands everything. He demands our lives.

So, it's really more than 10%. But as to where it goes, it goes where it's most needed for the kingdom. Now, in terms of television ministries and things like that, I would trust the local church normally more than I would trust a television ministry or send it all to these speakers on these videos you're watching.

No. The local church needs our support. But what I'm saying is the local church also needs to be using the funds in the appropriate ways too.

What was the tithe used for? Well, it was used to support the work of the ministry. The priests and the Levites were used to support the ministers who were doing God's work, who were worshiping God in the temple. And every third year it was used to throw a party in Jerusalem and share the resources with the Levites and the widows and the orphans.

Most of us today don't throw a party in Jerusalem. We're not taking literally all that it says about the Old Testament tithe. But the tithe is just one little piece of Old Testament stewardship.

Biblical stewardship is so much more than the tithe, the firstlings of the flocks, and other offerings. So, people can use it as a, you know, just so they have a figure in mind, so they'll do at least this. But keep in mind that biblical stewardship means caring for the poor, caring for the work of the ministry, caring for the things of the kingdom, and caring for the needs around you.

What it doesn't mean is going out and buying status symbols to look like everybody else. Anyway, enough said on that. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites, Jesus says, you give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill, and cumin.

Why does he specify these spices? Well, the tithe was a tenth of agrarian produce. The Pharisees were very meticulous about it, though they harmonized different passages and came up with three tithes, hence 20% for two years and 30% for the third, so they could throw their party in Jerusalem. So, what they ended up with was an average of about 23, and a third percent of their income a year was to go for tithing.

Pharisees were mainly urban and tithes affected mainly rural agrarian farmers. But the Pharisees were not hypocrites about that, per se. They re-tithed on any food they bought if they weren't sure that it had already been tithed on once.

But the tenth of their spices, what's that about? Pharisees debated whether some things were actually foodstuffs and, therefore whether or not they needed to be tithed on. Later rabbis said, yeah, tithe the dill and the cumin, but you don't need to tithe the mint. First-century Shammaites, who were dominant before 70 probably, the first-century Shammaites disputed even cumin.

They said, well, you don't need to tithe on that either. But Jesus here is addressing a super scrupulous Pharisee. You give a tenth of your spices, your mint, dill, and cumin.

This is a hyperbolic Pharisee. He tithes on everything, even the things that are disputed, whether or not you have to tithe on them. He tithes on those.

And yet this super scrupulous Pharisee misses the point. It's great, Jesus says, it's great you do that. But though you tithe, you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Now remember Jesus didn't think any matter of the law was light. Whoever breaks the least commandment, 519, but he did look for the heart of the law. And this idea of looking for the heart of the law and using that as a hermeneutical center wasn't new.

Think of Deuteronomy 10 verses 12 and 13. And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good. Kind of a summary of the law.

Micah chapter six and verse eight, he has shown you, O person, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with your God. Justice and mercy and faithfulness, Jesus says.

Now both Jesus and the rabbis agreed that no matter of the Torah was light. It wasn't like, well, I'm not going to pay attention to that. I don't have to do that.

Jesus emphasized that some things were weightier than some other things, however. Remember the first and greatest commandment. And the Pharisees were debating which is the greatest commandment.

Well, Jesus said, love God with all your heart, love your neighbors yourself. That together summarizes the law. You blind fools, which is greater? You blind people, which is greater? He asks them in 23:17 and 19.

So, some things are more central than others. I mean, in the giving of the law, one of the most central things is God's heart as God is revealing the law. The Lord, the Lord, gracious and merciful, the Lord who visits the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and fourth generation, but his hesed, his covenant love is to the thousandth generation of those who fear him and keep his commandments.

God's heart is at the heart of the law. Seeing, as he says in the Old Testament, Israel, I'm giving you these laws for your good. We see justice and mercy and faithfulness emphasized elsewhere in Matthew's gospel, the commending of the centurion's faith, Jesus showing mercy when asked for mercy, Jesus speaking up for justice.

Jesus' contemporaries also recognized that some statements in the law were more central than others. They called them more weighty than others. Sometimes they distinguished the human word from Godward commandments and lighter and

weightier commandments, but they didn't always do it exactly the way Jesus would have done it.

For example, the rabbi said that the punishment for neglecting the white threads of the prayer shawl was greater than the punishment for neglecting the blue threads of the prayer shawl. That was probably not the kind of thing that Jesus had in mind. It's certainly not the kind of thing he talks about having in mind as being what's central.

Well, then Jesus uses humor again. He knew how to hold his audience's attention. He uses a humorous graphic insult.

You blind guides. We already saw that's a pretty graphic statement. You strain out a gnat, but you swallow a camel.

In English, we actually got an expression about somebody straining at a gnat, and it should have been strain out a gnat, but there was a typographic error, a typesetting error in the original version of the King James Bible. And so, people, instead of saying strain out a gnat, it said strain out a gnat. And so people, that became a figure of speech in English sometimes.

But the point is they pay attention to minutiae. Tithing was small compared to the larger principles of God's heart, which may demand from us more than a tithe, or if somebody's really poor and that's all they have to live on to eat with, maybe they should be more likely receiving. Anyway, I won't go into that because people can make excuses for themselves.

But those of us who do have resources now need to consider how best we can use them for the kingdom. But what does he mean by straining out a gnat and swallow a camel? There may be a witty pun in Aramaic. Camel and gnat sound similar, gamla versus calma.

And you know, prophets often used puns to pronounce judgment. Micah chapter one has a whole series of puns. You have one in Jeremiah chapter one.

What do you see Jeremiah? I see a rod of an almond tree. Well, that was a wording that also spoke of, could also talk about hastening judgment. Amos chapter eight, what do you see? Amos, I see a basket of summer fruit.

Well, summer fruit, also the same word could mean the end. The end is coming for Israel. Well, there may be a play on words here, but beyond the play on words, there's also something that's pretty clear.

Pharisees avoided certain kinds of uncleanness. Leviticus chapter 11 said that if an insect dies in your drink or a lizard dies in your drink or something, you can't drink the drink. Well, many of us would agree with that, even for other kinds of reasons.

We think of it, in many cultures at least, as unclean. Although I did have to do it one time when my host was giving me that, and in his culture, it was very offensive if I didn't drink what he gave me. And he didn't see when he poured the fluid into it that there were some dead flies in the glass.

But anyway, normally they wouldn't drink something if something died in the drink. But the Pharisees, wanted to figure out, well, how small, how large does it have to be to count? Well, a fly would count, but they said anything smaller than a lentil doesn't count. So, if a gnat dies in your drink, it doesn't count.

But here we have a hyperbolic, super-scrupulous Pharisee. This Pharisee says, oh, even a gnat, I'll strain the gnat out, won't let it die in my drink so that my drink will still be clean, still be kosher. But then this same Pharisee gulps down a camel being the largest animal in the vicinity of Judea and Galilee.

The camels, Leviticus 11, camels were unclean. So, they strain out a gnat, which was debatable whether they had to do that or not, but they swallow a camel whole. They're fixated on small details, but they miss the heart of God.

They miss the big picture. Well, Jesus, while he's talking about uncleanness, he goes and talks about it some more because the Pharisees were masters of ritual purity. Tithing and ritual purity were two of their very big issues.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You clean the outside of the cup and the dish. Inside, they're full of greed and self-indulgence.

Clean the inside of the cup first. Well, Jesus here is playing on a debate that was among the Pharisees in this period between the schools of Shammai and the school of Hillel, where they talked about literal cups. Regarding literal cups, Shammaites didn't care whether you cleaned the inside of the outside first.

Hillelites said, clean the inside first. Jesus says, yeah, clean the inside first. But the inside of the cup I'm talking about is your own cup.

Clean the inside of your heart. Clean the inside of your life before you clean the outside. The Pharisees are masters of ritual purity, and yet Jesus is calling them unclean.

Well, the worst kind of impurity was corpse impurity, and Jesus is about to challenge them on that as well. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You're like whitewashed tombs.

They look beautiful on the outside, but inside they're full of dead people's bones and everything unclean. So, you appear righteous to people on the outside, but on the inside, you are full of hypocrisy and evil. Matthew 23 verses 27 and 28.

In contrast to most kinds of uncleanness, touching a corpse made one unclean for an entire week. Numbers 19. In fact, in Pharisaic tradition, this applied to so much as one's shadow touched a corpse.

That's why, if you remember the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke chapter 10, the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side. They didn't even want their shadow to come in contact with the corpse. And they're not even going to perform ritual duties in Jerusalem.

They're on their way back to Jericho where a lot of the rich priests lived. Jewish people whitewashed tombs in the spring to warn Passover pilgrims. So, they know, okay, don't risk touching this.

You might be unclean for the festival. But Matthew focuses on whitewash in a different way as a beautifying agent to conceal corruption. Ezekiel 13 speaks about this wall.

It's in really bad shape. It's corrupt. But you don't know it because it's all whitewashed over.

It looks like it's fine. Jesus says that's the way you are. People will get near you thinking you are so holy and they will contract ritual impurity from being in your presence.

That's how unclean you are. Now Jesus drives him the point even further. Oh, dead people's bones.

While we're talking about tombs, woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You build tombs for the prophets and you decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, oh, if we'd lived in the days of our ancestors, we wouldn't have helped them in shedding the blood of the prophets.

So, you agree. You are descendants of these ancestors. You know, they could have said, we are children of the prophets.

But look with whom they identified. We are children of those who killed the prophets. In antiquity, people could speak of being children in a couple of different ways.

You could be genetic children of someone or you could be like someone and therefore said to be like somebody's child that way. And so, Jesus is playing on that and saying, yeah, just exactly as you said, you are children of those who killed the prophets. So go ahead, fill up the cup of your ancestors.

They killed the prophets. Now you're going to climax their deeds by killing me. So, they invite the judgment that's saved up for them.

You snakes, you offspring of vipers, how will you escape being condemned to hell? Well, to Ghana. You know that ancients often believed that vipers hatched inside their mother and chewed their way through their mother's womb. We talked about that back in Matthew chapter three and verse seven.

So here they want to be descendants of their ancestors. And Jesus says you're basically like parent murderers. You're like those who killed their ancestors.

You're like those who killed the prophets. So, fill up the measure of your ancestors' cup. Far from being virtuous, these Pharisees were parent murderers, not good children of Abraham.

He said they killed the prophets, your ancestors. Now you will fulfill the ancestors' cup. Fill it up to the top by killing me.

And so, all the judgment that's been saved up from their time until this one, now it's going to fill up to the top. It's going to overflow. The cup will finally be ready for judgment.

Upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on the 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 judgment will come on this generation. Why on that generation? Because that was the generation that was going to climax the killing of the prophets by killing the ultimate prophet of Israel, by killing the Messiah himself.

All the righteous blood from Abel to Zechariah. You remember Abel's blood from Genesis chapter four. It cried out from the ground against his murderer.

That's why you read in Hebrews chapter 11 that he being dead still speaks because his blood cried out from the ground. In Hebrews chapter 12, the blood of Jesus

speaks better things than the blood of Abel. But in this context, the blood of Jesus is also going to be crying out for judgment.

It's going to climax these deeds. The last martyr in the Hebrew Bible, or at least the way we often think of the Hebrew Bible, didn't really have one scroll at that point where you could fit the whole Hebrew Bible. But we can at least say this is one of the last ones, the way the Hebrew Bible was normally arranged.

In what we call Second Chronicles 24, as Zechariah is martyred in the temple, he said, God, see an avenge. Now, Zechariah's son of Berechiah, seems to be blending together two Zechariahs. Jewish teachers sometimes would blend together things as a way of making sure that you alluded to the other one as well.

But for the sake of moving ahead, I won't go into all the details on that because I've already talked about that to some degree. But to just say, okay, this is the Zechariah who's murdered between the temple and the altar. The one in Second Chronicles 24, he cries out for vengeance.

In Jewish tradition, which also conflates him with the different Zechariah, but in Jewish tradition, it said that there was a fountain of blood spurting up from where Zechariah was murdered. And it kept spurting up from one generation to the next. Until finally, when the Babylonian captain, Nebazaradan, was carrying people away as captives, he saw this fountain of blood in the temple.

And he said, why is it doing that? Make it stop. And no one could make it stop. So he started slaughtering priests in the temple.

And I believe the rabbis said it was like 24,000. Rabbis were masters of hyperbole but slaughtered many priests in the temple. And finally, the people couldn't take anymore.

They cried out, God, forgive us for the blood of Zechariah. And then the fountain stopped. So, in a very graphic way, people also remembered that the blood of Zechariah cried out for vengeance.

But Jesus says all the righteous blood shed from the first martyr to the last will be required of this generation because this generation will climax all those deeds by killing God's own son. Well, what does he mean by this generation? Everywhere else in Matthew's gospel, it meant the generation then living. Chapter 27, his blood be on us and on our children.

In the year 70, the destruction came. Jesus laments over Jerusalem. And here God's love, his special love for Israel, special love for his people puts the rest of the discourse in context.

Yes, he's angry with the leaders who are exploiting his people, who are leading them astray, who are teaching their own ideas instead of God's heart. He's angry with them, but not because he's not loving, but precisely because he is loving. And he says, how I longed to gather you, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

How I longed to gather you. Well, you remember that the Old Testament often speaks of God gathering his people under his wings or sheltering his people under his wings. In fact, Jewish people continue to speak of being under the wings of the Shekinah, of God's presence, to speak of proselytes or converts as being brought under the wings of the Shekinah.

Jesus here is claiming to be divine and saying, I love you with the same love that God has always had for his people. God loves people. Ezekiel says he doesn't desire the death of the wicked, that they should die, but people have to respond to his love.

Blessed, he says, you won't see me again until you say, blessed is the one that comes in the name of the Lord. Well, they said that when they hailed him when he came into Jerusalem. And this saying, you won't see me again until you say, blessed is the one that comes in the name of the Lord.

This saying also appears in Luke, but in Luke, it appears earlier. In Luke it appears, I believe in chapter 13, it appears before the triumphal entry, I believe in chapter 19. But here in Matthew, it's placed after the triumphal entry because Matthew recognizes that there's coming a time in the future when finally, the Jewish people will recognize Jesus as their Messiah and will say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And at that time, then they will see him again. He will return. This is not referring to all Jewish people in history, but in the final generation, many Jewish people will turn to faith in the Messiah.

And many have been turning, but it also says that the good news of the kingdom will be preached among all the nations. God loves all people, but he's never forgotten or never lost his love for the people that he started with. Psalm 118, again, this quotation is from the Hallel sung during the Passover.

We've seen a lot about Jesus being a sage. Jesus is also a prophet. And you heard his prophetic voice as well in Matthew chapter 23.

Jesus says, all this blood will come upon this generation. And then he says, look, your house is left to you desolate. Well, what kind of house did he mean? Context settles which house he's talking about and when.

Jesus laments over Jerusalem in verse 37 before he says its house is left desolate in verse 38. He specifically promises the temple's destruction in the following verses, 24 verses one and two. Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him and they're pointing at the buildings and saying, look how splendid these buildings are.

Indeed, it was the most splendid building in the entire Roman world. And there was nothing that could have compared with it. The temple of the Ephesian Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

The Jerusalem temple wasn't. That was only because of anti-Semitism in the Roman empire because this was more magnificent than the temple of the Ephesian Artemis. But Jesus responded in a shocking way.

Jesus said you see all these things. I am telling you the truth. Not one stone here will be left upon another.

Every stone will be thrown down. This temple was renowned for its beauty throughout the world. It was larger and wealthier than any other temple in the ancient world.

It was the most holy site and the world's most holy city. For some Jewish people, for example, in the letter of Aristeas, the temple was considered invincible. Fourth Maccabees, another Jewish work written in Greek from the Diaspora, probably from Alexandria, says that God will defend this temple.

Jewish people expected God to defend this temple, just like the prophets in the temple of the last were saying God would defend this temple. Jesus says it's going to be destroyed. There were some people who believed that, but not very many.

The disciples then asked two questions. The temple mount itself could be construed as like a fortress and it was inside Jerusalem, which also had walls. The disciples then asked two questions.

When will these things take place? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? Grammatically, we have two questions there. It's not worded this precise way in Mark. Mark may have been writing before the destruction of the temple.

Matthew wants it to be clear, probably writing after the destruction of the temple. Matthew wants the wording to be clear. Prophets in the Old Testament would sometimes blend together events according to the kind of event.

So, in Joel, in the first two chapters, you have a locust plague that looks like an invading army. Chapter three, you've got an army, apparently at the time of the end, but some similar language is used in both because this locust plague is a nearer judgment providing a prism through which Joel can speak of the day of the Lord, which he does speak of, the day of God's judgment. There were days of God's judgment within history, but they foreshadowed the ultimate day of judgment.

The disciples asked two questions. The first one, when will these things take place? Well, Jesus has just said, you see all these things, not one stone will be left upon another. So, when will these things take place? When will the temple be destroyed? He's got to answer that.

He's also answering another question, the sign of your coming and of the age's end. The temple's destruction, the abomination that brings about desolation in the holy place that he will specify in 2415. In that context, he's going to talk about fleeing to the mountains and so on.

He's also going to talk about these things being fulfilled within a generation. Was the temple destroyed in a generation? Yes, it was. Roughly 40 years after Jesus said it, which was a common length of a generation in biblical chronology.

The signs of the end. First, Jesus is going to give the non-signs. Then he's going to give what really is a prerequisite for the end.

You'll see these things. The end is not yet, but when the good news of the kingdom is preached, then the end will come. But he doesn't call them signs.

And finally, he says, and he's talked about the destruction of the temple and so on, but finally he says something that he calls a sign. When you see the sign of the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory. In other words, if you're waiting for a sign, you're going to wait until it's too late.

So, he gives sort of signs of the end as well as non-signs and then the real sign. So, with the temple's destruction, these things will be fulfilled within a generation. With Jesus coming into the end of the age, Jesus said, no one knows the day, nor the hour, not even the sun, nor the angels in heaven, but only the Father.

The temple's destruction. Jesus says, your house will be left to you desolate in this generation, which in Matthew's gospel was always the generation then living. It's not talking about a final future generation.

It's not to say it can happen again. If the temple is rebuilt again, it could be desolated again. But to say that what Jesus specifically prophesies here was fulfilled in that generation, as he said it would be.

Then he speaks of a desecration of the temple that makes it desolate. So, it's desecrated and it's destroyed. The temple was destroyed in a generation, exactly 40 years, if we have right the date when Jesus was speaking, probably exactly, if not exactly, pretty close to and a little bit less than, but about 40 years after Jesus predicted it.

Now that was not unusual in the sense that whenever Israel sinned, God allowed the temple to be desecrated or destroyed. It happened in the Babylonians. It happened under Antiochus Epiphanes in 165 or so BC, the second century BC.

It was desecrated by Pompey, a Roman general in the first century BC. It was destroyed by the Romans in the first century AD. It was further desecrated by the Romans in the year 135 under Hadrian.

And some people would argue for other ones as well. When Israel sinned, the temple was destroyed, desecrated, or both. And Jesus' prediction is surely authentic.

It's multiply attested. It's coherent with other things that Jesus talked about. Jesus gave an act of judgment in the temple, not just smashing a pot, but overturning tables.

Also, the false testimony against him. Well, who was going to make up false testimony? But some people had a garbled testimony that he said he would destroy the temple. And you have something like that in John where Jesus says something like that, but he says, you destroyed the temple, I'll raise it up.

But he was talking about the temple of his body. But there were people expecting a new temple. Even some people who didn't expect the old one to be destroyed, expected it to be transformed.

Also, this is in Mark. It's within a generation, probably from before the temple's destruction and even earlier material than Mark, because your house is left you desolate is some of the shared material between Matthew and Luke, probably from what scholars often call Q for those of us who believe in that. Jewish Christians continued to worship in the temple.

They wouldn't have made up such a saying themselves. And there were a few other people who had the insight to recognize it was going to happen. Joshua ben Hananiah, in Josephus's War, Book Six, Paragraphs 300 and following.

Jesus, son of Ananias, Joshua ben Hananiah, was saying, woe to the temple, woe to Jerusalem. He was arrested for that by the temple authorities who didn't like being challenged and didn't like prophecies of judgment any more than it was like in

Jeremiah's day or in Jesus' day. He was arrested, handed over to the Roman governor, and beaten, Josephus says, until his bones showed.

Testament of Levi, 15. The temple would be destroyed because of the priest's uncleanness. Also, the Testament of Moses, six, which is very probably pre-Christian because it doesn't go as far as this.

It says only part of the temple would be burned, but it speaks of part of the temple being burned. And also, some of the Sibylline oracles may speak of something like this. There was also a widespread expectation of a new temple in First Enoch, the Qumran temple scroll, and in the regularly prayed prayer, the Amidah.

Also, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the Habakkuk Pesher, the Kittim will carry off the Jerusalem priesthood's wealth. That was well before 70. They were expecting judgment on the temple establishment.

There's a bit of hyperbole here. Jesus says, not one stone will be left on another. There were some stones left in the retaining wall, technically not from the temple proper, but because there were some stones left, this was not something likely that people made up after the fact.

Jesus doesn't talk about destruction by fire here, although he does in the parable back in Matthew 22. And again, some scholars say, well, if you were making it up after the fact, you'd probably include this detail and not that detail. So also, Jesus uses the language of Old Testament prophets here.

But even later rabbis attributed the destruction of the temple to judgment. Jesus wasn't alone in that. He just was more on time than that, than the rabbis who recognized it after the fact.

In this context, Jesus says to flee when you see the desecration that will lead to destruction. Like Abel's and Zechariah's blood, the ladders in the temple, bloodshed invited judgment. And in the year 66, Josephus tells us the Jewish patriots slaughtered the priests in the temple.

Josephus describes that as the abomination that brought about desolation. Josephus was alive during this time. He participated in this war.

Josephus thinks that was the abomination that brought about desolation. Three and a half years later, after that abomination, the temple was in fact destroyed. Well, we're going to see more about Jesus' warnings to flee during that.

And we're also going to see what Jesus went on to say about judgment, not only on the religious establishment of his day but how he talks about his coming again.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 16, Matthew 23-24.