

42 *“But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithes of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 43 “Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the front seats in the synagogues, and the respectful greetings in the market places. 44 “Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it.”*

45 *And one of the lawyers said to Him in reply, “Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too.” 46 But He said, “Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. 47 “Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. 48 “Consequently, you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs. 49 “For this reason also the wisdom of God said, ‘I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, 50 in order that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.’ 52 “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.”*

53 *And when He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, 54 plotting against Him, to catch Him in something He might say.*

I wish you all a well Palm Sunday this morning. In Matthew's parallel text in Matthew 23 we find ourselves in passion week as Jesus pronounces these judgements on the leaders of the nation of Israel. So it's fitting this morning to continue our study we began last week.

I've been reading a book titled "The Pastor of Kilsyth" by Islay Burns. It's about his father, the Reverend Mr. William Hamilton Burns also the father of William Chalmers Burns who was instrumental in the revivals in Scotland of

1839 and later missionary to China with Hudson Taylor.

This era in the British Isles produced the likes of William Cowper, John Newton, John G. Paton, and Robert Murray M'cheyne and C. H. Spurgeon. Revivals broke out all over Scotland.

It was a season of singular piety and worship of God. An awakening and return to the roots 200 years earlier of the puritans, that first generation of great saints of mighty power in God immediately after Tyndale's giving the scriptures to the masses in their own language.

I love to read the biographies, some of the classic writings of previous generations like Pilgrim's progress. You read that stuff and you think, are those guys for real. Their lives seem to me as unobtainable as giants. Their faith and single minded devotion to spiritual things.

Their single minded purpose to work tirelessly for God's glory and His kingdom, matched with prayer lives that also seem unobtainable to me. They are like hero's. Giants in an age of dinosaurs, far removed from now.

We do this though. We dream about and memorialize past generations that were greatly blessed and used for God's purposes. They become almost idols. There are websites, hundreds of them, that want to be somehow associated with the giants. They throw names around and seem to want you to identify them with the giants who they quote and the old books now reprinted.

Last week I talked about group think. Mob mentality. Pack mentality. And I said it's the human condition, we are prone to identify with some group or mob or pack and be moved about by mob think. Group think.

This morning we're looking at another human condition, another thing we do, and that's idolize past giants and want to be associated with them, even though, under scrutiny, the work ethic and devotion and faith they exhibited doesn't look anything like ours.

It's just an association. I'm with these guys, except I haven't worn any holes in the carpet next to the bed praying or likewise seen great movements of God's power glorifying the Saviour through mighty fruitfulness.

I just throw their names around as if I'm somehow in their company. Again, nothing new under the sun. Because that's exactly what these pharisee's were doing. Jesus isn't impressed.

47 "Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them."

They were memorializing their idol's the prophets. They had construction projects building monuments to their idols. Building massive tombs. If it was Egypt they would have built pyramids for the prophets.

They were saying, this is who we are. We're the same as the prophets and we're recognizing their greatness and importance by building great monuments and tombs where their dead bodies can lie. We're like them. Our brand is Prophets. We associate with them.

In the Matthew parallel to this passage Matthew quotes Jesus saying; Matt. 23:

29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

If we'd been living when they were living we would have been associated with those guys. Those are our guys. We're the same as the prophets. We wouldn't have shed their blood. We'd have been right there with them bringing it. That's who we are. We are in the direct line of succession to those guys. Those are our guys.

And Jesus says, no, you've got the families mixed up. You are the sons of the

men, the rebellers and haters of God, who killed the prophets. You are direct descendents of those guys. Prophet killers.

It turns out, and we'll see this later in this same passage, there are really only two families on earth. Those who belong to Satan, are ruled by him, and do his wicked bidding. Each of us, every one, are born into that family.

The other family are the ones who God has quickened from the dead, breathed life into dead bones, by His indwelling Holy Spirit, blood brothers with Christ who has purchased us out of the other family and we dwell in Him. We have His righteousness, a righteousness not our own, God's righteousness imputed to us because we are in Him. We are in Christ. That's our family association. In Christ. Like the song says; *I am His, and He is mine.*

These pharisees and lawyers, rulers of Israel, are claiming to be in God's family, but meanwhile they are plotting the death of Jesus even as their fathers didn't rest until they had murdered and shed the blood of the prophets they idolize.

In John chapter 8 Jesus discusses at length with these same men about who their father is. It's like it could have been said on the same day. Identical idea of two families; Satan's children, and God's children, and Satan wants God's people dead. John 8:

41 *“You are doing the deeds of your father.” They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.” 42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.*

The parallel is amazing. In Matthew and Luke as He pronounces woes He says you're doing what your father's already did. They killed the prophets. You want to kill me.

43 *“Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot*

hear My word. 44 ***“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies.*** 45 ***“But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.*** 46 ***“Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?*** 47 ***“He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”***

Two families on earth. Satan's family is universal. We are born into that family. But some are chosen. Some are purchased out of that family. The prophets were purchased and owned by God. They spoke His words.

These religious men who hate Jesus, want to identify with the prophets. They build monuments and tombs to idolize the prophets. But they are in their father's family. Their fathers who murdered the prophets . . . as they will murder Jesus.

47 *“Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them.* 48 *“Consequently, you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs.*

This next section has a fascinating twist. There are some difficulties but exciting possibilities in interpreting here.

49 *“For this reason also the wisdom of God said, ‘I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, 50 in order that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.’*

What makes this interesting and fascinating is that this quote from the wisdom of God; *the wisdom of God said* is not in our Old Testaments.

Now there are some similar things, some equivalent ideas of course in the Old Testament. But not these words that Jesus spoke.

In 2 Chronicles, the historian, the chronicler of Israel telling their story says;

Nevertheless, the LORD sent prophets to bring the people back to Him and to testify against them; but they would not listen. 2 Chronicles 24:19

Time and again the LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to His people through His messengers, because He had compassion on them and on His dwelling place. 2 Chronicles 36:15

And God through His prophet Jeremiah keeps repeating it over and over;

And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and because I have spoken to you time and time again but you would not listen, and I have called to you but you would not answer, Jeremiah 7:13

For from the time I brought your fathers out of the land of Egypt until today, I strongly warned them time and time again, saying, "Obey My voice." Jeremiah 11:7

And the LORD has sent all His servants the prophets to you again and again, but you have not listened or inclined your ear to hear. Jeremiah 25:4

Jesus quote just seems to be the combined "wisdom of God" from these and many other places. One in particular came to my mind as I was thinking about this quote that isn't an exact quote, it's more like combined wisdom, and that is from Isaiah 5. God's vineyard.

*Let me sing now for my well-beloved
A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.
My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.*

*2 And He dug it all around, removed its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
And He built a tower in the middle of it,
And hewed out a wine vat in it;
Then He expected it to produce good grapes,
But it produced only worthless ones.*

*3 “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
Judge between Me and My vineyard.*

*4 “What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?
Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce
worthless ones?*

*5 “So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard:
I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed;
I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground.*

*6 “And I will lay it waste;
It will not be pruned or hoed,
But briars and thorns will come up.
I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it.”*

*7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel,
And the men of Judah His delightful plant.
Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed;
For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.*

Jesus puts his own twist on the vineyard. In His version the workmen, the tenants of the vineyard mis-treated and killed the owner's servants (apostles and prophets) until finally the vineyard owner sends His own Son to receive the produce from it, and the evil tenants murder the Son.

The combined "wisdom of God" in all of the history of the Old Testament is that God keeps sending His men to warn Israel and they keep killing them.

Nobody would argue with that interpretation.

But here is another possibility that I think is very exciting. We do have almost this exact quote, and it's in Matthew's gospel, which Luke probably had with him as he wrote, and the quote is something Jesus says.

I think Luke is quoting words of Jesus from Matthew. Here is the text from Matthew's gospel;

33 "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell? 34 "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, 35 that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 "Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation Matthew 23:33 - 36a

If that's the case, and I think it may well be, this would be the earliest occurrence of one New Testament writer recognizing that another New Testament writer is in fact writing inspired words of God.

Jesus says, and whatever Jesus says is the wisdom of God, He says You've systematically murdered the prophets from A to Z. Abel to Zechariah. Abel was the first and Zechariah the most recent before John.

But then He says something more frightening than that. All of the blood from all of the prophets is going to be charged to these men that He is warning.

Why is that? Because all of the righteous blood of all of the righteous prophets is not because they had a righteousness of their own, it's because they looked forward to this prophet, the Son of God, who would give them His righteousness.

All of the prophets from righteous Abel to righteous Zechariah are righteous

only the same way anyone else is righteous before God. They were in Christ. And this generation is going to murder Christ, the single righteous Son of God in whom anyone who is declared righteous, derives their righteousness.

When you murder Jesus, you've murdered everyone else who is in God's family. Every righteous person has one source for their righteousness. Jesus Christ.

So there is a sense that if wicked men murder you or me, because of the Word of God, that righteous blood looks back to Christ. And if other wicked men murder prophets before Christ, that righteous blood looks forward to Christ. Therefore, Jesus says, all of the righteous blood that has been spilled from Abel to Zechariah A to Z will be charged to these men who are plotting the murder of Jesus.

Satan's people have been murdering God's people from time immemorial because Satan ultimately wants to murder Jesus. That war has been ongoing since the fall, since Abel, and it continues today. Murder them if you can, persecute them if you can't murder them.

All of the apostles were martyred except John, and John is exiled on the isle of Patmos in his advanced age. Foxe's Book of Martyr's is an interesting read. Generation after generation of God's people being executed. Jesus says; *that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth*

All the righteous blood shed on earth. To this day and both before and now and forever, all righteous blood that is shed is In Christ. All of it. And so these men are charged with all of it! Past Present Future. Satan isn't finished shedding christian blood. The guilt goes to this generation, these men. How terrifying.

There is a final solemn woe. Equal in weight to this previous one. Also terrifying from a judgement standpoint. And sobering to anyone who calls themselves a teacher of the things of God.

52 *“Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.”*

People who take the oracles of God, intended to give people a key of entrance into God's family, they take that and mess it up so that not only they are lost, but everyone else they teach is more lost; If you are responsible for causing that harm, WOE to you.

He says, people were entering and you blocked them. You hindered them. You're the gatekeeper that stops them from entering and diverts them from the narrow path, onto the wide road that leads to hell. Woe to anyone who is charged with this.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. Mark 9:42

Better to have a giant rock tied around your neck and be cast to the bottom of the sea than to hinder someone who was believing.

Last night I listened to a guy named Costi Hinn. He's a nephew of Benny Hinn, the prosperity gospel guy. His dad and his uncle and others in the family, it was their family business to promise wealth and take needy folks money.

He speaks of these poor desperate people, one couple wanted a baby, do anything to have a baby, and these guys cleaned them out until they were bankrupt and in debt. No baby. When they leave, these folks are farther away from God than ever. Broken hearted and somehow it's this mean god's fault because you didn't have enough money to buy enough faith to make what you wanted, happen.

They fly around in their corporate jets and rob people blind in the name of God. They hinder the gospel. How frightening to be one of those people who is gathering wealth and hindering little ones from ever really knowing the

Saviour while you're doing it.

Somehow God purchased Costi Hinn out of that mess and now he is traveling around preaching the real Jesus. He's like one of God's trophy's. What a testimony. Email me if you want a link to listen to his stories.

That's just one example. People teaching false doctrines in order to gather wealth and riches for themselves while they hinder the seekers from ever finding God. That was the business of religious pharisees and scribes and lawyers when Jesus walked on earth, and it's the same business today of countless heretics who are in it for the cash, leaving wreckage in their paths.

Woe to anyone who hinders someone who is trying to find the keys of knowledge of God in this book. Better to have a 200 pound rock tied around your neck and be cast into the sea. Much better than to face God with this judgement to your charge.

The lawyers are the ones who mess with the words. They are doing the same thing Satan has done from the first moment in Genesis 3 that we meet him.

"*Hath God said . . .*" I know you think you know what God said, but let me tell you what he really said. Satan twisted God's words and brought the whole human race crashing down to hell with him. By twisting words.

And that's what these lawyers are doing. And that's what the prosperity gospel guys are doing, and that's what every cult leader has done in the past and is doing now.

God didn't mean what the simple meaning of His words says, He means something different, and blah blah blah on it goes forever and ever. Woe to people who mess up God's words.

The final warning in this book is the same old story begun by Satan in Genesis 3. It's in Revelation right at the end. Rev. 22:18,19

18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

That's why James cautions and says in chapter 3:1

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. Jas. 3:1

The possibility for judgement increases exponentially for teachers because of this woe. Woe is me if I hinder you from believing. If I'm the guy in Satan's shoes with my sheeps clothing on so you're fooled and I'm saying God didn't really mean what His book says. Don't worry about the book.

All that book does is cause trouble. Dis-unity. Leave the book get dusty so we can all get along. Woe.

53 And when He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, 54 plotting against Him, to catch Him in something He might say.

There's something both diabolical and also under the sovereign plan of God that Jesus foretells to these men exactly who they are and what they're going to do, and they don't hear or understand or believe what He has just told them, and like little robots, they immediately launch into what Jesus says they're going to do.

You're going to kill me because your father is the Devil and he was a murderer from the beginning and you're his children. And He walks away and they plot how they're going to do what He just said they're going to do. It's beyond dumbfounding.

It is difficult to understand that God is sovereign even over the evil that Satan

plots and carries out. God sovereignly allows evil for His purposes. Scary subject and one we want to handle with kid gloves. We don't want to get this wrong. But it's exactly what Peter says at Pentecost;

*22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— 23 this Man, **delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 “And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.*

It was God's foreknowledge and plan that these wicked men would put His Son to death. Wicked hands accomplished it. And God will judge those wicked men for their wicked deeds. Yet somehow God is sovereign over it all.

Small doses of those depths. Our brains are too little to understand the plans and purposes of God. We simply rejoice that we are His little ones, His chosen ones, His called out ones.