

No More Loopholes

The 7 Woes series

by Chris Famisaran

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the opportunity to be able to gather together. Lord, thank you for our fathers. Bless them, watch over them, be with them as they continue to lead and disciple and mentor their children as well. Lord, we thank you for the men who've stepped up especially to be even bonus dads or a father figure in the lives of children and even adults who need a father figure. As we dive into Matthew 23 leading, guide us in Jesus name. Amen.

How many of you are homeowners or people who do not want to wait for the landlord to fix something? Anybody? So about a year ago, I noticed that there was water coming out through the air gap. It's that thing that usually sticks to the left or right of the faucet in your kitchen sink. Didn't know that. This is a line to help kind of keep things clear and make sure that the garbage disposal and dishwasher remain healthy and clean and sterile. But then I also noticed that all of the dishes, when we ran the dishwasher, would get this white filmy stuff on top of it. And so I threw every cleaning tablet into the dishwasher as much as possible. I lifted stuff, I cleaned it, and yet the dishes did not come out clean. And this was very frustrating because I was really tired of washing bowls and cups by hand. I wanted my dishwasher to work. So where did I go to Google and I found that maybe potentially there was a line. I think it was between. It was between the garbage disposal and the line going up near the air gap may potentially be filled up. So I pulled everything from underneath the kitchen sink, undid that line, disconnected it to the line just going up part to the air gap. And when I pulled it out, I had a bucket underneath, thank goodness, because all of a sudden this dreadful, wretched smell permeated from underneath the kitchen sink. And I had on my face right next to it. Fortunately enough, I tried to get all the gunk as much as possible into the bucket. I undid the whole line. I went outside, I took it out to the front, and I cleansed that line with the hose out front.

Funny enough, I put it back together. All of a sudden I ran the dishwasher and the dishwasher was fine. Water stopped coming out of the air gap, but it took a bit. I had to find out what was the root cause, what was the heart of the issue, and it was literally having to deal with the guts of the underneath of my kitchen sink.

Today I want to continue to go through Matthew 23 our next set of woes. And as we talk, we've been talking a bit about the Pharisees and how Jesus is rather consternated with these individuals and he shares and he continues to speak to them. So our next set of woes. Matthew 23. I want to look at verses 25 through 28 if we have time. We'll also hit 1st Samuel 16, Matthew 15, and Proverbs 4. Want to make sure though, for those of you who are following online or whatever, you can easily see that as well. Okay, are we there?

Matthew 23: 25-28. Woe to the teachers of the law, you hypocrites. You clean the outside of the cup and 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 hypocrites. I'm sorry. And then outside also will be clean.

Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs. You look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are full of bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to appear as righteous, but on the inside, you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

And so kind of going back to my kitchen sink, everything looked fine on the outside, but it wasn't operating as it should inside. Literally had to look at the clogs, the lines, what was keeping this. Because if it wasn't working correctly, what would happen? It would contaminate and not clean the dishes and water would come out and make what a mess.

Now, how many of you have also purchased a car? Okay. How many of us have purchased a car? Have you ever purchased a car that was a lemon? Okay. Have you ever purchased something that was a lemon? Some of you are thinking, well, I can just go get lemons and sprouts. Lemon. A lemon car is something they actually, I believe they made a law, lemon law, that if you purchase a car and it does not work like it's supposed to, as in the car was

just bad from the very beginning, you can try to return it. Hopefully you can recoup your money.

So there's a story told of a guy who went to a used car lot and he's talking to the salesperson and he's saying, hey, you know, I'd like to purchase a car. Don't want a new car. Just try to keep the mileage low. But I also want to just make sure I get something to get me from A to B. And so the guy said, I got the perfect car. In fact, we just got it in. It was incredible. It was shiny paint, it was a clean interior. They actually made it smell, you know, that new car smell. Oh, I love that smell. That's a good smell. It made it smell like that. Not a scratch on the exterior. And the seller told him, hey, you know, this car, it was owned by a sweet older lady. She only drove it to church and back for Bible study. What could go wrong? And so this guy says, you know, this is a. It's not just a car. It's a blessing. So what did he do? He bought it. And at first, it was fine. You know, you get that first couple of miles, and it feels great. Something new, something magical, a new journey.

And then the reality hit, though. A week later, he's driving, and suddenly something doesn't sound right. And all of a sudden, he. After he, you know, gets to his appointment, goes through the appointment, gets back, he turns the car on, his dashboard lights up like a Christmas tree. What in the world. The oil light was on, the engine light was on. Why? And yet it seemed that this car was now trying to reveal its true identity and its true character and what it was really like. So the guy took it to the mechanic. Mechanic looked at it, got the diagnosis. He popped the hood up, and he just stared. And he said, well, first of all, the thing's been cleaned very well. Okay, it looks great, but internally, there's sludge underneath the engine. The wires look patched together. Parts seem to be worn out. When you got it, they must have just done enough to make it feel great. So it looks great, but underneath, it's a mess.

And when you look to going back to our passage, okay, Jesus said you cleaned the outside, but inside you were full of what, Corruption? From a distance, everything looks good. All of these individuals, it seemed like they were the people to aspire to. They seemed put together, they seemed polished. They seemed impressive because of their knowledge, but underneath, what was

their heart. And eventually, you can try to hide things for a time, but eventually the truth comes out.

And those of you who've been married or been in a relationship long enough, you can act good for a year or two, and then the real you comes out. Bad but true. You know, sometimes we get enamored with charisma. We get enamored with shiny things. We get enamored by appearances. We get enamored by people who seem that they are put well together and in this case in the car, the engine was not put together.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law, they tried. They put up a good appearance. They acted like they knew things, but they were not humble, and their heart was not in the right place.

I remember when I first got baptized many a year ago, I told myself I wanted to be the best Christian possible. And I was good for about a week. And then I realized I said something. I thought something that I should not have said or thought of. And then I did something I shouldn't have done, bought something. I bought a CD that did not align with my Christian values at the time. And I realized, have I really changed? Am I any different? And see, what I was trying to do is I wasn't trying to be authentic. I wasn't trying to be real, or I was trying to hide and fake who I was. Because I wanted to be good enough. I wanted to act the part. I wanted to look good.

Now, I want to go to another passage. Let's go to 1st Samuel 16. Okay, 1st Samuel 16. And I want to look at verse seven. And this is a time where David is being called.

Okay, 1st Samuel 16.

If we look at verse 7, God calls Samuel to go. And in fact, he's a little petrified. When God says, hey, I want you to go find this guy. And he's like, Saul's gonna try to kill me if you do, right? So he goes. He goes to the house of Jesse. He has all the sons come out. And the first son, Samuel's thinking, this guy looks good. He's handsome. He looks like a good king. He looks anointed. He's ready to be. And God said no. Went through all the sons, none of them. And he's like, do you have any more sons? There's one more son. But what's interesting here is that Samuel was looking at the exterior. Verse 7, it says, but

the Lord said to Samuel, do not consider his height or his appearance, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance. But the Lord looks at what? The heart. Now, what does Jesus say about the heart?

Let's go down to Matthew 15. Okay, Matthew 15, Matthew 15. And I want to start at verse 16. Okay, Matthew 15, verse 16. All right. We all there? Okay. Are you all. So what dull? Jesus asked him, don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a pervert person's mouth come from where the heart. And these defile them. For out of your heart comes evil thoughts. Murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person. But eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.

I think, number one, there's two things you could look at this way is number one, what are you feeding your heart? What are you feeding your mind? What are you feeding? What are you eating? Because what we eat, what we feed ourselves does not, does that not affect how we feel?

You know, you realize, hey, I want to make some positive changes in my life. I want to make sure I feel better. I want to grow strong, healthier. And so you start to eat well and then you have that drive by and you see, oh, I'm over there, that's my favorite spot. I'm just going to go over there, have a meal. And it was great, it tasted great. But then you realize, oh, that's the reason why I stopped eating unhealthy food. Now, I'm not a dietitian, okay? So I'm not saying just only eat healthy food, just be reasonable, but also enjoy life. What we feed our minds, our bodies, and especially our heart affects how we look at things.

And oftentimes I think the Bible describes the heart as the true source of life. And so where do motives lie? And the heart is obviously it's an analogy, okay? But the heart is central key to our body existing. If you don't have a heart, you're not going to have any blood that's pumped. You also need a brain to make decisions, right? But the heart, analogy wise, where are your motives, your desires, how do you live? And so Jesus isn't just criticizing the behavior of the Pharisees. He's also looking at where are their motives coming from? They say the right words, you know, they attend all of the services that they should.

They try to maintain a perfect image. But inside their heart, they are heartless, they are unkind. And some of them, they're downright trying to extort individuals. If you read other parts of the Gospels, maybe they also had selfish ambition. They could not humble and ask questions. Just maybe, did they get it right or did they perhaps get it wrong?

Proverbs 4:23 says, above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Now, as Bill mentioned, I literally got here at 11:22. I left on time at my usual hour to make sure I have enough time that if something happens, I'll have a little bit of wiggle room, some flexibility, and you know, make sure I get set up. I always do music before Sabbath school. And thank goodness it was a day that I was not teaching. And so I'm thinking, okay, fine, you know, I drive. And then I'm on the fast lane, thinking I should move over. And then I saw a CHP unit thinking, he's got the lights on. I was like, oh, he's gonna go get somebody. And then he goes and starts swerving. I was like, no. Because he was literally, like, right there. Right there. How many of you feel superior when you beat that sigalert? It's right behind you. I felt smug before. This time I was horrified. And of all the. My greatest nightmare was realized today is that I was stuck and I could do nothing. There was no loopholes. I could not get off because I thought, you know, there was an exit coming up. But I would be the most inconsiderate driver today if I were to just jump over. Okay. It wouldn't have been right, and it would have been unsafe. And I thought, oh, they'll just clear it up.

Well, I'm sitting there. We're kind of inching forward, but we're not really moving. And then I get really nervous around 9:50. Like, we're stopped. I'm under a bridge, and there's no way around it.

And so I text. I called Bill, and I said, dude, I'm really sorry. I honestly, I may not make it today. I sent him my sermon and props to him. He was willing to preach today, okay? So I want to make sure that's known. I want to give him credit for that.

But I learned a lot of lessons today. But I also learned a little bit about myself that I'm unhappy with because I sat under that bridge for an hour thinking, how inconsiderate. I'm going to be late.

I don't want to be looking like a bad pastor. I have to keep my image up. I have to make sure I'm here on time. I have to do this, I have to do that. And where was my heart in the real reality? And if I'm going to be very transparent and authentic, I'm chastising myself because unfortunately, the accident was so bad, both sides are closed. Okay, yeah, it was that bad. Somebody passed away this morning. I don't know the exact details. All I know is that the freeway is probably still closed. It was so bad that the CHP rolled up behind us. An officer was telling people to turn around, drive backwards, or drive around and head opposite direction when we should be heading westbound. We were headed east to catch the exit, the exit that I was literally 10 minutes before sitting under.

And, you know, it's funny, I was sitting in my car and thinking, okay, what can I do? I mean, I'm preparing for my sermon. And I thought a song that I. An artist that I just been recently listening to, something that I listened to as a child. And I credit my mom for this because, you know, she's not a pastor or anything. But you know what she did? She instilled little things like playing music. And that same music that I was listening to 30 years ago. Let me just turn that on. There was a particular song by Steve Green called Guard you'd Heart. Most of you probably don't know who he is, but as an Adventist kid growing up in the church, Steve Green was very famous. He's still. Still very popular. But I remember that song, and listening to that song and kind of helping me prepare to stay calm because it's getting. Time's ticking. I already felt bad that I missed the music for Sabbath School. I've never missed a sermon that I can think of. And it was close.

And through all of that, I realized, this is such an inconvenience. This is so much drama. But then I realized, let's look at the perspective. A family lost a family member. I could have left an extra five minutes. I could have done this or that. And sometimes life is not fair. I can't control. There were no loopholes. And in my heart of heart, I was frustrated because I felt like the most important thing was I needed to be here. That was on my mind. And so as much shade as I want to throw at the Pharisees, I'm no different than them, because I may act. I may want to look like I act right and do the right things and try to speak well, but my heart was just as dark as the Pharisees. And so I had to check myself and have a reality check. And it's like, dude, it's going to be okay. Bill is going to be able to preach if need be. I knew

you guys would be okay. But I made it about me when I was sitting in the car. And it can't be about me.

I want to live with authenticity. I want to be real. And I think that's one of our. It's one of our. Maybe our unspoken values. But we value realness, right? We. We value authenticity. And so I share that because I realize I'm no better than the Pharisees. I was more worried about appearances than I was about Somebody who lost their life and also getting here safely.

Funny enough, Bill, I'm glad he did this. He's like, hey, everything's gonna be fine. Don't drive crazy. To which I'm glad I've lived long enough that 20 years ago, yes, I would have driven like a madman down here. I didn't. Because there are some things yet you just cannot control. But you try to be faithful. Life can be challenging. You're gonna have surprises. But how we respond to those surprises. Are we going to respond to it with patience and authenticity, or are we going to try to control the situation like the Pharisees tried to control everything? Billy Graham said, God looks at the heart, not at the outward appearance. Okay. Tim Keller also says the gospel says, you are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, yet more loved and accepted than you ever dared hope.

Francis Chan said, our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at things in life that don't really matter.

Loopholes. I think Steve Green or, you know, Scripture says, guard your heart. Guard it well. We sometimes try to find loopholes. I tried to find the loophole when I was sitting on the freeway. Can I do this? Can I do that? Why are people driving backwards? I want to do that. Sometimes we have to be patient. Sometimes we have to think, hey, let's make sure we're aligned with God. Instead of saying, what can I get away with? What's the condition of your heart? So today, do I want to be a reflection of Jesus? My behavior did not reflect Jesus. This morning in my heart, I want to be real. I want to be authentic. I want to be able to admit, hey, when I don't know something, that's okay, but I'm going to go find the answer, right? How many of us are willing to do that?

And that can sound scary because you feel like you maybe as a leader, as a parent or whatever, I have to be perfect. I can't appear to look weak. But what is that example that you're trying to set? Sometimes, you know, you have to try. You have to act like it feels like you're faking it, but at the same time, too. What kind of setting example are you? What example are you setting for your employees, your kids, your neighbors, your friends?

Be authentic. What are the things that. So one of the things that I've realized is that, again, the Pharisees, the teacher of the law, they're not being authentic. They're certainly trying to be faithful. You ever have a friend or somebody you know who tries so hard to either be your friend or somebody's friend, and you realize, like, dude, it's okay. Be yourself. Were the Pharisees being themselves the other thing too? You know, the I'm good lie?

There's a guy who showed up to work one day, and his friend asked, hey, how you doing? He said, I'm good. How many of us tell that lie? How many of us tell it every day? Sometimes some days you're gonna have a great day. How many of you actually say, I'm having a really bad day? Unfortunately, there was one day I was having a bad day, and the poor Trader Joe's checkout clerk asked me how was I doing? And I said, I'm not having a good day. And the poor girl, she's like, that's not the standard answer she receives. It's like, I'm sorry. And I felt bad afterwards. But, you know, I realized, hey, that was the point where I realized, you know, maybe I should actually deal with this issue that I'm dealing with instead of trying to ignore it.

We say, I'm good, but the truth is, he wasn't. We aren't. Sometimes this individual was struggling. His marriage was not doing well. He was sleeping poorly. His anxiety had built up quietly inside of him, and he still tried to say, I'm good.

And I think oftentimes the Pharisees, maybe they're trying to say, we're trying to do better than good. But I wonder how many of them really struggled because they're trying so hard to be perfect and to try to set a standard and. And to be fair. They were doing what they were taught and told. Okay, but that's not real. That's not authentic. I think sometimes they tried to find loopholes. I think most people aren't struggling because life is hard as well. I think they're struggling because they feel alone and they pretend to be okay.

And being authentic doesn't necessarily mean, like, you gotta share everything with everyone, but it just means being honest with yourself means being honest with your God and the people that you can trust.

So what holds you back from being authentic? Do you feel the pressure to try to be the best, to look okay? Or are you tired of that? Do you want to be authentic? Do you want to lead a life that is filled by the print, but led by the principles of faithfulness and justice and humility?

I think life will rapidly change when you're not trying to wear a mask but be authentic. I wonder what would have happened if the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, chose to lead with authenticity and not try to fake it and not try to lead. Try to find loopholes.

So, reflection. Is there an area in your life where you're failing to practice what you preach? Ooh, that's tough, right? I already know what mine is. I got a couple already. Is there an area in your life where you're failing to practice what you preach?

This week, I want you to identify at least one of those areas. Okay? Identify that area, create a plan, and follow through on changing it this week. Why do I ask this? Because I want you to live with a life that is awesome. I want you to lead with a life that you feel like you are growing in Jesus. Don't be afraid. I've learned the farther, the longer you run and don't deal with things, the more painful it gets.

I realized, and I've shared this before, I feel better when somebody makes a mistake and they explain right away rather than maybe five years later. It's a little more understanding when it's right away because then we can help that person grow. Okay? Especially, like, if I'm. If I was in charge of that person, hey, you know what?

Maybe it was my fault because I didn't share how you should do this project as effectively as you could have, or I didn't share the whole, whole, whole perspective. I want you to lead. Lead a life that lives with freedom, with authenticity, to not try to act like everything is great, but to lead with the perspective that you are in good hands, that Jesus will lead and guide you and

be with you through the ups and the downs. To not look like you're all put together on the outside, but then crumbling inside. Let's fix what's internal. Ask God. I should say, let me rephrase that. Ask God to help heal you internally, that you might be a cup and a vessel for the Lord, that others may know who Jesus is.

Father in heaven, I gotta say, it's been an emotional day and it's only half day. Lord, forgive us of our shortcomings. Forgive us, Lord, where our hearts need to be cleaned out. Help us to be faithful to you and Lord as well. I just want to take a moment, be with the family or families who've lost a loved one today. Guard their hearts. Help us, Lord, to be faithful to you. And Lord, sometimes that might require some spiritual surgery. Lord, work on our hearts. Help us to make the changes in our life that not only reflect you, but gives us peace and freedom to live for you and for others. In Jesus name, amen.