

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## WOE TO YOU ... HYPOCRITES (4)

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### Matthew 23:13-31

In our last lesson, we were discussing the subject of hypocrisy in Matthew 23 and we saw that hypocrisy is a sin that has catastrophic consequences. When Jesus said, *How will you (scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites) escape being condemned to hell (Matthew 23:33)? or He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:51)*, the message is clear. The fate of the hypocrites is to go to hell.

Therefore the problem of hypocrisy has to do with the very matter of salvation. If we do not deal with it, there is no salvation to talk about. There is no hope for salvation. Knowing this, we want to do everything possible to stay away from hypocrisy. But we become more nervous when we know also, as we saw the last time, that hypocrisy is part of the human nature. No one is immune from it. So how do we deal with this problem?

Let's turn back to Matthew 22:41-45 to seek an answer. In this passage, the Lord Jesus initiated a question on the identity of the Messiah.

*Matthew 22:41. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42 saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "The Son of David."*

*43 He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying:*

*44 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool"?"*

*45 "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?"*

### The deity of Christ

What is the point of this discussion? Why did Jesus question the Pharisees about the Messiah? It is important to understand that in the Bible there is a progression of order and thought. Events are not written in a random fashion. And here, the identity of the Messiah is discussed immediately before the problem of hypocrisy.

'What do you think of the Savior, the Messiah,' He asked them. 'Whose son is He?' They said, 'He is the son of David.'

David, as you know, was Israel's greatest king. David was the one toward whom all Israel looked back with joy. The days of David were glorious days for Israel, when Israel stood independent as a nation. Most of the time, Israel was either trampled by this nation or by that nation. It was once under the heel of Babylon. It was under the heel of Persia. It was under the heel of Egypt. It was under

the heel of Rome. Israel was simply too small and their dream for independence could not be realized. But in those brief days, in the days of David the king, they were truly independent. It was a period in the history of Israel where every Jew could think back with joy and pride. And we find in the Bible that the Messiah, the Savior, was going to come from the house of David.

The Pharisees gave the right answer. But there comes a problem. If He is David's son, if the Savior is David's son, how come David calls Him Lord? A father calling his son, Lord?

Jesus said to the Pharisees, 'Have you ever called your son, Lord? That would be unthinkable for any of you. Well, that's exactly what David did. Just read Psalm 110:1: *The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.* If the Messiah were born to David's line as you correctly answered, how can a son of David be referred to by David himself as Lord? A father is always greater than his son in position and in rank.'

The Pharisees were puzzled by this one. Verse 46 tells us that they could not think of an answer. Why? Because they had consistently failed to see the glory of the Messiah. They failed to see that He was more than just an ordinary man, not just the son of David, but also the Son of God.

Actually the question was not that difficult. The problem Jesus presented from His quote in Psalm 110 was the double use of the title Lord. If the first Lord refers to God, then the second Lord must refer to the Messiah. David called Him Lord because the Messiah is greater than him. And the Messiah can only be greater than David if He is more than a son, i.e. he is God Himself. From that passage, Jesus sought to prove that He was God. But the Pharisees were not ready to accept that.

## **The lordship of Christ**

The practical point that emerges from this is that the king the Jews looked up to, David, was able to call the Messiah 'My Lord,' even though he was his father in ancestry. Yet David acknowledged that his son was greater than himself. Contrary to the Pharisees, David had the humility to recognize the greatness of the Messiah, that the Messiah will be God Himself. In that sense, David already lived under the lordship of Christ.

The point Jesus was driving into the mind of the Pharisees is this. The root of hypocrisy lies in the rejection of the lordship of Christ. David could have rejected the lordship of Christ and claimed the position of fatherhood. He could have claimed the position of kingship. But he did not do that. On the contrary, he acknowledged Jesus as Lord. He acknowledged the Christ as his Lord.

And Jesus is saying to the Pharisees, 'If David could call the Messiah Lord though he was his son, how much more should you have acknowledged the Messiah as Lord. Because you have not acknowledged the Messiah as Lord in your life, there is no savior for you to look for. And since you have no savior, you are bound to fall into hypocrisy.'

That is why the identity of the Messiah, the Savior King, is discussed before Jesus begins to condemn the Pharisees on their hypocrisy. The Pharisees believed that there would be a coming Messiah, but they did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah. They did not acknowledge Him as Lord.

What does that mean for us? The situation is simply this. Either we acknowledge Jesus the Messiah as Lord, or else we will be living a life of hypocrisy. There is no middle ground between these two. Either Jesus is truly Lord of our life, or else I have no alternative but to live as a natural man, in my own strength, and therefore to live in hypocrisy.

We must understand that when we become a Christian, we acknowledge Jesus as Lord of our life, as Master of our life, not just with our mouth, but in our heart. From that moment, He is King in

our heart. Or else, we are simply going to be another Pharisee, i.e., on the outside, behaving in a religious way but with no real change inwardly.

## Justice

Let's continue to explore this question of the lordship of Christ. We will move to chapter 23. Matthew 23:23.

*Matthew 23:23. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, **justice** and **mercy** and **faith**; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.*

The Pharisees were hypocrites because they were very careful with small things but they overlooked the most important things, namely justice, mercy, faith. We need to look at these 3 things, justice-mercy-faith, because they are closely linked to the lordship of Christ.

Let's take the first one, justice. In Greek, it is the word *krisis* which basically means judgment. It is used 12x in the gospel of Matthew. Elsewhere in Matthew, it is almost always translated by the word 'judgment.' For example, the expression 'day of judgment,' which appears many times in Matthew, uses the word *krisis*. Take Matthew 12:36: *And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of **judgment** (krisis).* It also occurs in Matthew 23:33: *You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence (krisis) of hell?* The sentence of hell is in fact the judgment of hell.

I don't know why the translators decided to use the word 'justice' in Matthew 23:23. I would prefer to keep the word as 'judgment'. Judgment, mercy, faith. Because if we are conscious about the judgment of God, that we will have to face the judgment of God, then we will be very careful with justice. This means that a Christian who truly acknowledges the lordship of Christ will live with the judgment day in view. He will be careful with the way he lives because he is aware that a judgment is coming.

Of course, the lordship of Christ is expressed in the matter of judgment. That is what Paul was saying in his sermon on Mars Hill. Acts 17:31: *... because He (God) has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.* God has appointed a judge, Christ, and a day in which we must all stand before God in judgment. You and I, everyone of us, will have to give an account of ourselves before the divine Judge. If we are aware of the lordship of Christ, we also know that his lordship will be expressed on the day of judgment. Therefore we will be very careful about how we make decisions in life and how we conduct ourselves.

## Mercy

Let's move to the second element. Mercy. This is a word that is found in so many places in the Bible. The Pharisees, because of their legalism, failed to grasp the basic requirement of being merciful. In Matthew 9:13, Jesus had to remind them of Hosea 6:6: *For I desire mercy and not sacrifice...*

Mercy is simply the expression of love. It is love in our relationship to each other when we have been offended. Mercy is expressed for example in Matthew 18:33 in terms of forgiveness. 'If I had mercy upon you, should you not have had mercy upon your fellow servant? Should you not have forgiven him?' To talk about love when we are not forgiving is pure hypocrisy.

So if we claim that Jesus is our Lord, the first thing that we will be conscious of is the fact that we will have to answer to Him one day. The second thing that we will take seriously is the command to show mercy. *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful* we read in Luke 6:36. If we are unwilling to forgive, then we do not know Jesus as Lord because we are not obeying His words. We are simply saying, 'Lord, Lord,' with our lips, but denying him in our conduct.

## **Faith**

Let us now come to the last element. Faith. We will spend more time on that one. How do we define faith in terms of the lordship of Christ?

I would like to deal with that question by looking at the use of the word 'faith' in the gospel of Matthew. The word 'faith', in Matthew, occurs 8x. And one of these 8x is of course here in Matthew 23:23.

Now let's move backward and look at the other occurrences. In Matthew 21:21, we read this. *And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have **faith**, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it shall happen."* This verse speaks about the power of faith. Faith is the source of great power for the disciple of Jesus.

Let's move to the next passage. Matthew 17:20. *And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have **faith** as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you."* We see the power of faith. The power to transform, to move mountains, to change everything.

The next verse is in Matthew 15:28. *Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, your **faith** is great; be it done for you as you wish."* And her daughter was healed at once. Jesus is speaking to a Canaanite woman whose daughter was possessed by a demon. The woman pleaded with the Lord Jesus to heal her daughter. Here we see the healing power of faith applied to a particular situation.

Then we have Matthew 9:29. *Then He touched their eyes, saying, "Be it done to you according to your **faith**."* The two blind men, you remember, cried out to the Jesus, pleading with Him that He would heal their blindness. And Jesus restored their sight.

Then a few verses back. Matthew 9:22. *But Jesus turning and seeing her said, "Daughter, take courage; your **faith** has made you well."* And at once the woman was made well. Here we read about a woman with a bleeding problem who is healed instantly because of her faith.

Another person is healed in Matthew 9:2. *And behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their **faith** said to the paralytic, "Take courage, My son, your sins are forgiven."* Because of the faith of certain people, a paralytic is healed.

The last passage is in Matthew 8:10. *Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled, and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great **faith** with anyone in Israel."* In this case, a servant is healed through the faith of a centurion.

What do we learn about the meaning of faith in these seven examples? You notice that five of these have to do with physical healing. This is very important to observe. The relationship between physical healing and spiritual healing is very close in the gospels. There is very little distance between physical healing and spiritual healing as exercised by Jesus. The reason for this is that sin is seen as a spiritual disease. Spiritual disease and physical disease are both related to sin in the Scriptures. The healing of one is an analogy of the healing of the other. Remember the case of the paralytic. 'Which is

easier?' Jesus said, 'For Me to say to this man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk"?' The answer is that it is the same. To heal spiritual sickness or to heal physical sickness, there is not much difference between the two.

Sin brings on sickness. If sin is in your life, then you are spiritually sick. Let's read Isaiah 1 to illustrate this point. Isaiah 1:4-6.

*Isaiah 1:4. Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him.*

*5 Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in your rebellion? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint.*

*6 From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts, and raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged, nor softened with oil.*

The picture of sin is the picture of illness. The man who lives in sin is sick, from the top of his head to the sole of his feet. There is no healthy spot left on that person. That is why in Isaiah 53:5, we read, *By His stripes we are healed.* By His wounds, by the punishment that Jesus took for us, we are healed from our spiritual disease. Our healing comes from the sacrificial death of Christ applied into our lives.

So when we exercise faith, what do we actually do? Well, we come to Jesus as a person who is spiritually sick, and we place our faith in Him to heal us. Just like the blind man. Just like the paralytic. Just like the woman with the issue of blood. Just like the centurion and his servant. We come to Jesus and say, 'Lord, I'm spiritually sick. There is no soundness in me, from the top of my head to the sole of my foot.' The Lord Jesus will ask us, 'Do you believe I can heal you? Do you believe I can restore you spiritually?' And you say, 'Yes, Lord. I believe you can. You have the power. Only you can transform me and heal me from my spiritual sickness.' The Lord will say to you, 'Be it done to you according to your faith.'

That is faith. Faith is the confidence that God can transform you, that He can deliver you from your natural tendency to hypocrisy. He can make you whole again. He can make you spiritually healthy. That is saving faith.