***“JESUS CONFRONTS FAKE RELIGION!”***

MATTHEW Chapter 23

***> (v1-12) WOE!!! – Stop—Look—Listen—Live!***

**(v1-3) False religion is all talk, no walk. *“Faith without works is dead.”* (James 2:14-26).**

**(v4-10) Let’s observe four false traits of “BIG SHOW” religion:**

**- False Trait #1 - (v4) Works salvation (religion), they say, but they won’t do.**

**- False Trait #2 - (v5) They love to look the part in their very religious garb.**

**- False Trait #3 - (v6) They must be in the top places, with the top people to show how important they are; this maintains their credibility and continues to puff their egos.**

**- False Trait #4 - (v7-10) The religious leaders love titles, notice Jesus told them NOT to call themselves *“Rabbi, Father, Teacher.”* Titles always breed superiority and dominance.**

**- In verse 7 the term “Rabbi” speaks of master it literally signifies great. Today many TV preachers say they are “anointed,” or they have the “anointing,” and they can give you the “anointing;” they also warn us with great threatening “touch not God’s anointed,” meaning don’t question them, nor their authority.**

**- Jesus is the only Master, Teacher, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of God, *“hear ye Him!”* the Bible declares. John the Baptist had it right when he said, *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (Jn. 3:30).**

**- Jesus says we are to be *brethren*, in unity and equality. In other religious circles, such as Catholicism they like the religious hierarchy such as the Pope, as Catholics call him “Holy Father,” also Priests are called “Father.” Yet, Jesus said not to call anyone Father, except *“He who is in Heaven.”* This does not, of course, forbid us to apply the term to our birth father (Ex 20:12; Matt 15:4; Eph 6:1-3). This means that no one is to establish themselves as a spiritual father over God’s people.**

**- Jesus says for us not to be called *“teachers,”* the Greek word is *kathegetes* (kath-ayg-ay-tace'); a spiritual guide like a guru, meaning they are your one and only teacher.**

**- The Bible speaks of PASTORS and TEACHERS in Ephesians 4:11-16 - *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.***

**- Peter defines the heart of a TRUE SHEPHERD in 1 Peter 5:1-4 - *The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.***

**(P.S. – Peter was not the first Pope, he called himself a *“fellow elder.”)***

**(v11-12) Jesus teaches believers to be *humble servants* of God.**

**- Let’s understand *Humility* – True humility is a freedom from arrogance that grows out of the recognition that all we have and are comes from God. The Greek philosophers despised humility because it implied inadequacy, lack of dignity, and worthlessness to them. This is not the meaning of humility as defined by the Bible. Jesus is the supreme example of humility (Matt 11:29; Mark 10:45; John 13:4-17; Phil 2:5-8), and He is completely adequate and of infinite dignity and worth.**

**Biblical humility is not a belittling of oneself (Matt 6:16-18; Rom 12:3), but an exalting or praising of others, especially God and Christ (John 3:30; Phil 2:3). A humble person, then, focuses more on God and others than on himself.**

**Biblical humility is the recognition that by ourselves we are inadequate, without dignity and worthless. Yet, because we are created in God's image and because believers are in Christ, we have infinite worth and dignity (1 Cor 4:6-7; 1 Peter 1:18-19).**

**True humility does not produce pride but gratitude. Since God is both our Creator and Redeemer, our existence and righteousness depend on Him (John 15:5; Acts 17:28; Eph 2:8-10).**

**(from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary)**

***> (v13-36) Jesus pronounces 8 WOES of judgment!***

**#1 - (v13) *WOE! The Wrong message!***

**Their message led people away from God, from the Messiah, from the atonement, from justification by faith, from a spiritual birth *(“You must be born again!”* (Jn. 3:7). They replaced the Law and the prophets with trust in man-made religious rules, exaltation of man’s religious works, faith not based on the Word of God, salvation based on good deeds outweighing bad deeds. In the New Testament Jude exhorts us with these powerful words, *Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Jude 3-4)**

**#2 – (v14) *WOE! The Wrong heart!***

**These religious leaders were full of greed and showmanship.**

**Peter again exhorts in 2 Peter 2:1-3 - *But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.***

**#3 – (v15) *WOE! The Wrong teaching!***

**Observe Paul’s testimony before he met Christ, as Saul he thought he was doing God service by persecuting the church (Acts 22:2-5 - *Then he said: "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.)***

**#4 – (v16-22) *WOE! The Wrong worship!***

**The religious leaders worshipped things instead of God. The gold isn’t important, God is. The altar of burnt-offerings, in the court of the priests was made of brass, about 30 feet in length and breadth, and 15 feet in height, (2 Chron 4:1). On this altar were offered all the beasts and bloody oblations of the temple, once again it was God’s altar and the devotion to Him that was to be valued. David wrote in Ps 29:1-2 - *Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, Give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.***

**#5 – (v23-24) *WOE! The Wrong religion!***

**They performed religious duties, but lacked the true character of God, which is *“justice, mercy, and faith.”* Is this our Christian life?**

**#6 – (v25-26) *WOE! The Wrong ambition!***

**The religious leaders had become extortionists and lived in excess plundering the people. They manipulated the people through guilt or false representation of God to pillage property and money.**

**#7 – (v27-28) *WOE! The Wrong life!***

**The religious leaders were wolves in sheep’s clothing, appearing one way, living another.**

**#8 – (v29-36) *WOE! The Wrong witness!***

**Their religion had become a witness of the devil through persecution and murder against God’s true prophets and ultimately His only Son! All these woes lead to a wrong destiny, a highway to hell instead of heaven.**

**- In verse 36 we discover an interesting revelation regarding the Jews as Jesus uses the term *“all these things will come upon this generation,”* *this generation* in the Greek can refer to all those who will continue to perpetuate this mindset against God and His Christ, their Messiah; meaning that judgment will befall future generations. This is a truism as we have seen vicious persecution against the Jewish people throughout history.**

***> (v37-39) Judgment or Salvation!***

**If only the Jews would turn to Jesus for salvation, He loves them so much. He tried to move their hearts toward Himself, but they would not listen, they would not receive, but rather rebelled and rejected Him. In verse 38, Jesus says their *“house is left to them desolate”* meaning the temple is vacant, God is not there, just like the Old Testament where a child was named *Ichabod,* which means *"The glory has departed from Israel!"* (1 Samuel 4:21). Thus now, they will crucify the Lord of glory!**

**- Israel’s forsaken and desolate times will subside at the second coming of Christ, for at that time, a remnant Israel (one-third) will finally recognize that Jesus is their Messiah, (Rom. 11:25-27; Rev. 7; Zechariah 12:10-11 - *"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem . . .*)**

**- Jesus said in John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.***

***-* Jesus said in Mark 8:34-38 *- "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."***

**- Jesus also said in Matthew 10:33 – *“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”***

**The choice is yours like Israel to receive or reject, to be loved by God or cursed to condemnation. What is your decision?**