

When Atlanta was trying to win the bid for the 1996 Olympics, along with it came promises of a major overhaul and the hopes and dreams and excitement of the people of Atlanta were at an all time high.

Watch this.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp6J8neNKXE>

I read one article that said Atlanta would sometimes do studies or polls, asking people what they most liked about the city and sometimes the responses back would say, "casinos." Because people were getting Atlanta confused with Atlantic city. But now, billions of people around the world would hear and see Atlanta. Billions of dollars were poured into the city to make it ready. New dormitories that housed athletes, new stadiums, new parks, old buildings being torn down, upgrades to roads and public transportation. The City of Atlanta was getting a major facelift.

At least, the parts of Atlanta that would be seen. Residents of low income neighborhoods nearby say that because they wouldn't be seen or noticed by tourists, their neighborhoods were completely overlooked. Others say that while the place of Atlanta was improved, the people of Atlanta aren't any better off. Rembert Browne an award winning popculture, sports, and political writer says that the overwhelming sentiment of residents in Atlanta seems to be, "let's just move on."

In the minds of many, Atlanta had gone through major attempts to appear good without actually being good.

Here's the issue. We do this all of the time. I've heard of a college that had windmills that were just for show. They weren't functional, didn't generate electricity, but the college wanted to appear to be environmentally friendly. It was easier to appear good than to actually be good. We've experienced people fudging numbers, bending the truth, controlling the narrative of a particular event, or in some way being more concerned with the outside than the inside. Why? Because we believe it will make our lives easier or that it will be more rewarding in the end or we fear the consequences of someone finding out the truth. Either the process will be easier if we just make it nice on the outside but don't worry about the inside. OR the outcome will be better if we neglect the inside but keep up the outside.

We're in the middle of this series called Versus and we're looking at Matthew 23 where Jesus pronounces these 7 woes. He's combating the culture, the teachings, and the behavior of the Jewish religious leaders at the time.

There are two places in the Old Testament where prophets pronounce a series of "woes." Isaiah 5:8-23 and Habakkuk 2:6-20 in both cases they are dealing with evil people who look evil on the outside as well as on the inside.

By the time we get to the New Testament though, Jesus is speaking religious people who have cleaned up the outside but are still evil on the inside. So These 7 woes of Jesus are directed at a different looking group of people than the ones the prophets of the Old Testament spoke to.

Here's what I love about this series. Jesus is taking something ambiguous and nebulous like the culture of the religious Pharisees and he's scrutinizing it very specifically. And we start to see all of these overlapping layers of a religious yet sinful culture. And I appreciate Jesus' precision at identifying and providing examples for just what has gone wrong in this religious environment.

So it's forced us as a church to look at these things like "Hypocrisy" and to think about it the way Jesus was thinking about it. We looked at a term like "Self Righteousness" and we broke it down and saw how that was different from hypocrisy. And last week Kory undertook the task of figuring out just what Jesus was talking about when He mentioned "weightier matters of the law."

If you missed a week, it's all online at waiteparkchurch.org

This week we see that all of these things – Hypocrisy, Self-Righteousness, and missing the forest for the trees, they all create this sort of Outside-In Religion. This culture where appearing good takes precedence over actually being good.

Here's the truth from today's passage that I want us to explore:

Appearing Good is More Costly Than Being Good.

Say that with me right now:

Appearing Good is More Costly Than Being Good.

I think that's easy to say. I also think it's easy to say that we believe it. But let's be a little more specific.

- Which is more costly
 - o to hide the fact that you look at porn
 - o or tell someone about it, seek accountability, and address it?
- Which is more costly
 - o to continue using alcohol to self-medicate?
 - o Or to admit that you have a problem and seek help from others?
- Which is more costly
 - o to ignore your need for marriage counseling and reconciliation?
 - o Or to commit to rekindling your love and affection?
- Which is more costly
 - o to harbor bitterness against someone else
 - o Or to address your hurt and pursue forgiveness?
- Which is more costly?
 - o to continue having premarital sex
 - o Or to tell your boyfriend or girlfriend that that can't be a part of your relationship anymore and create healthy boundaries?
- Which is more costly?
 - o to gossip and slander?
 - o Or to admit that you enjoy those sins, seek accountability, and fast from saying negative things about others?
- Which is more costly
 - o to continue a habit of occasional lies and stretching the truth and making yourself look better?
 - o Or to be committed to speaking the truth, and correct yourself when you say something false?
- Which is more costly?
 - o To keep dating that boy or girl that draws you further from faith?

- Or to end that relationship?

Let's take a moment to pray and ask God to reveal our sins to us. Because it's so easy for us to overlook or forget about our own sin.

Pray

Now here's the question. Are we really willing to believe that **Appearing Good Is More Costly Than Being Good?**

Let's look at what Jesus has to say about this from **Matthew 23:25-28**

25 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

So Jesus gives these two metaphors for explaining the Outside-In religion of the Pharisees. He knows it's their practice to clean cups and dishes before eating or drinking and this again wasn't law but it was their man-made customs and traditions.

Think about what it would be like to only ever clean the outside of your cup. Or better yet what would it be like to have this cup (hawk a loogie in it) and then fill it with your favorite drink? If I wiped off the outside, would it do any good?

I'll do you one better though. Because you guys are Christians right? You're a new creation. You're a new wineskin. And you're filled with the Holy Spirit – a new wine. Should I spit in it? Should we be okay with the inside being dirty?

Or better yet think for a moment what it would look like to be diagnosed with cancer and to be totally convinced that the remedy was to take baths and use moisturizers.

The Church Father Origen says (and I'm paraphrasing here) that a Christ follower who isn't aware of his own sin is like someone who visited a doctor but the doctor just sewed up an infected wound. You're just treating the outside but the inside is still festering.

So you see, this is a costly mistake. Jesus says, **"woe to you."** It's an expression of deep grief and sorrow. For Jesus, Appearing Good is undeniably More Costly Than Being Good.

Jesus goes on to talk about these white washed tombs. The Jews would use a lime mixture or something to bleach their tombs. They appear clean and pretty on the outside but inside is a foul smelling, decomposing corpse. On the outside they look clean and pure but they're far from it. The inside is dead.

So let's talk for a moment about

The Cost of Appearing Good

I think there are so many directions we can take this in and rather than just looking at my own experiences or picking and choosing things that make sense, I think it makes even more sense to limit ourselves to this text that we're studying.

1.) *We Become Delusional!*

Read Matthew 23:29-32 with me.

²⁹ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.³⁰ And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'³¹ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.³² Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!

Jesus says that the Pharisees like to think of themselves as better than their ancestors. They falsely imagine that they'd behave differently than their ancestors did. They've cleaned the outside. Like we said before, the Prophets of the Old Testament pronounced woes on people who looked evil and did evil. In this passage, Jesus is talking to religious people who look good.

When we focus on the outside, it's easy for us to deceive not only others but we also begin to deceive ourselves. And this is so dangerous because I'm not sure how to wake someone up to this. People who continue to do evil and know they're doing evil are so much better off than people who continue to do evil and think they're doing good.

And eventually, the more that we hide our sin, the more that we pick and choose other things to focus on, right? We say oh "this isn't what makes a person bad, this thing over here is what makes a person bad." We lose our ability to see ourselves clearly.

We hosted a Q Commons event here the other day and the first speaker, his name was, David Brooks, mentioned that – and I liked this definition of humility because it's got a slightly different twist. He said, "humility is being able to look at yourself from the outside." It's not that we're always outwardly focused or that we never pay attention to ourselves but it's that we're able to see ourselves from God's perspective.

Appearing Good will cost us the ability to see ourselves clearly.

We Become Blind to Our Sin

The Pharisees in this passage have allowed the appearance of good to dictate their lives. So in verse 5 we find out that everything they do is done for people to see. That motivation to appear to be good has totally overwhelmed their lives.

⁵"Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.

Think about this in your own life for a moment. Are you motivated by your appearance? Is there a hint of this in your life? Do you need titles and honor? When you do a good deed do you need others to know about it? Are you quick to tell others or to find an excuse to post your good deed on social media?

Do you get hurt when you don't get credit for something you did? How does appearance dictate your life? And is it a warning sign that you're focused on the wrong things?

In 25 and 28, where Jesus calls the Pharisees a white washed tomb he says four things that they're filled with. He says they're full of greed, they're full of self-indulgence, they're full of hypocrisy and wickedness. You can see just how many of those sins that Jesus names are self-focused, they've come out of being preoccupied with appearing good.

The Bible has a lot to say about the consequences of sin.

- Sin makes our prayers less effective
- Sin distances us from God's presence
- Sin hurts our community
- Sin causes us to lose our assurance of God's favor (mention Job)

I've heard it said before that

"SIN TAKES YOU FURTHER THAN YOU WANT TO GO, KEEPS YOU LONGER THAN YOU WANT TO STAY, AND COSTS YOU MORE THAN YOU WANT TO PAY."

We Become a Bad Example (23:3b, 13-15,

When Jesus uses the metaphor of whitewashed tombs, he's saying two things. The first, we said is that the Pharisees look clean but they're really dead and rotting and unclean.

On the other hand Jesus knows the reason that his culture whitewashes tombs. It's to make them more visible so that people won't accidentally come into contact with them and become unclean.

Whitewashed tombs are a sort of caution tape. It's why in another passage Jesus calls the Pharisees "unmarked graves which people walk over without knowing it."

Jesus is telling the Pharisees that by appearing Good but not being good it's not just costly for themselves, it's also costly for others.

When we care more about appearing to be good then we do about actually being good, we're in no condition to do ministry. I'm not just talking about formal ministry. I'm talking about being a godly friend, a godly parent, a godly spouse, a godly neighbor, and co-worker. Appearing good costs us our ability to do the work of God's kingdom.

Jesus begins this whole discourse by saying:

²"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

And then later on he says:

15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

Think for a moment about how New Testament Christians flipped the script. They were willing to show their flaws and sins and failures in order to bring God glory and help others to learn from their example. Even though they were the leaders of this fledgling religion, they trusted in the teachings of Jesus and

the power of God. They didn't hide behind false reputations. They didn't place themselves on untouchable pedestals. We learn early on that the disciples were people that struggled with pride, with understanding Jesus' teachings, they deserted Jesus in his time of need, Peter denied Jesus three times. Paul calls himself the chief of sinners. And how do we know this? Because the disciples were willing to portray themselves this way in their own writings. Luke details a falling out that takes place between Paul and Barnabas and Paul writes to the church about a time when he had to rebuke Peter to his face. These weren't perfect people. They were people who were willing to share their flaws and failures. Yet Paul says on multiple occasions, "imitate me." He knew he was a work in progress and that's what made his example worthwhile. That's what made his example effective.

Here's the bottom line. You can't imitate something that you can't see. You're a bad example if you don't ever let people see you and continue to live behind a façade.

We don't find what we're looking for

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."

The kingdom of God is like a beautiful treasure. It's hidden. It takes work to find it. It's costly. But it's worth it.

Appearing Good feels like a shortcut. It takes less initial energy. It takes less initial sacrifice. Ultimately though it doesn't lead to the place that you want to go. There's no reward. There's no treasure. Jesus says to the Pharisees in another place, "If you want to do good deeds in order to be seen then fine, you have your reward. You're seen." The Appearance of good turns out to not be a shortcut at all. You can't sidestep the process of being made new. Appearing good only means that you will still be festering and rotting on the inside. The dead will not be found in the Place of Life.

AW Tozer puts it this way:

If you want God to be good to you, you are going to have to be good to His children. You say, "That's not grace." Well, grace gets you into the kingdom of God. That is unmerited favor. But after you are seated at the Father's table He expects to teach you table manners. And He won't let you eat unless you obey the etiquette of the table.

So what does Jesus say to the Pharisees?

They're blind guides. They'll never get to where they're going.

So what do we do? How do we stop appearing good and start being good? How do we clean the inside of the cup?

I think the answer is twofold

This isn't the only time that Jesus talks about the outward ceremonial rules of hand washing and dishwashing that the Pharisees had contrasted with the things that God actually cares about. We're going to wrap up today by looking at two other places from scripture. The first is in Matthew 11:15-20.

At the beginning of this chapter The Pharisees confront Jesus and his disciples about not washing before they eat, according to the tradition of the Pharisees. And there's a parallel passage in Mark of the same event where washing of cups and dishes is explicitly mentioned. **And this is what happens shortly after.**

¹⁰ Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand.¹¹ What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them."

Now let's just pause for a moment and say that Jesus is not giving license to abuse drugs. The New Testament is very clear about God's expectation for Sobermindedness. What Jesus had in mind was ceremonial laws and clean and unclean foods. We see that in Mark 7:19 where the author explicitly says ((In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.) and again, that's not a reference to pot brownies, it's a reference to Old Testament dietary laws.

So this is what happens next:

¹² Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"

¹³ He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."

¹⁵ Peter said, "Explain the parable to us."

¹⁶ "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. ¹⁷ "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸ But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them."

What does Jesus say? Jesus says, it's a heart issue. What comes from a person's heart defiles them.

So the first thing we do is we give our hearts to God. We receive a new heart. We need to be made new. The Bible sees this as a work that can only be done by God. The Old Testament prophesied about a future time when God would do this for His people. This future time unfolds during the ministry of Jesus.

We read about it in **Ezekiel 36 where God says**

25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

The New Testament also refers to this moment of conversion as a circumcision of the heart. Paul says that true Jews aren't Jews physically, they're Jews inwardly.

It comes from **Romans 2:29**

29 No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

Notice how Paul ends it – such a person’s praise isn’t from other people. He says it’s not about outward appearance but rather their praise comes from God.

In Deuteronomy and in Jeremiah God tells the people to circumcise their hearts. To love Him with all their heart and soul.

So very plainly, we’re talking about conversion. Submitting yourself to the love and lordship of Jesus Christ. Taking Him to be your Lord and Savior. Turning away from sin and to Jesus.

This is not an easy process. Conversion happens in a moment but it’s also a process. We work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

You know there are times in our life when God builds us up. He equips us. He’s the potter who is adding on more clay. But there are also times when God takes away. He becomes a sculptor who takes a hammer and a chisel and he knocks this piece off and that piece off.

C.S. Lewis says it this way

“Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.”

This is what it costs to be good. Even though it sounds like a lot, I believe that in the end it’s a lot less costly than appearing good and in the end we end up with more than we’ve lost.

And remember we said the answer is twofold.

The first thing we do is we give our hearts to God at conversion and we’re made new. We receive new hearts from God. The second thing that we do is found in Luke 11 and to be honest, it’s going to be surprising to you at first. Jesus’ words here are hard to see coming.

I want you to look with me at Luke 11

We find out Jesus’ prescription to the issue at hand in Luke 11. It’s a parallel verse to Matthew 23. You’ll see the similarities. **Look at verses 39-41**

39 Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. 40 You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

We receive a new heart from God and then **we reflect the heart of God.** That’s the twofold answer.

Jesus says as for what is inside you – be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. The Greek there looks something closer to “Give the inside as alms.” I like the NRSV translation a little more for understanding this verse.

⁴¹ So give for alms those things that are within.”

Now this has double meaning. Give the inside of the cup and dish to those who are in need. Right? So, give food and drink to the hungry and the thirsty. But Jesus has demonstrated that the inside of the cup is also the soul of the man. It’s our being. So what else is Jesus saying? Be so compassionate towards those that have less that it moves you to action. Right? Because He doesn’t just use the word mercy he uses the words alms which is mercy or compassion in action. It’s literally giving to the impoverished BUT Jesus is saying this is something that starts from within. He’s not talking about a purely external giving. It’s not the action Jesus is concerned with. It’s the heart that leads to action. Love the down and out. Live sacrificially towards those who go without. And not just financially, for some of us that’s not an option. But Jesus calls us to give ourselves. Spend time with. Love. Teach. Care for. Share life with. And here’s the hard part for me – if you have the heart of Jesus – wouldn’t this come naturally?

You see the Pharisees were already really good at giving in order to be seen. Jesus says to give mercifully out of the heart.

If you want to truly be clean, you must receive a new heart from God and after you must continue to reflect the heart of God by caring for those who are in a lower position than you.

You can’t read this book without seeing that God has an incredible amount of compassion for those who are suffering, for those who are neglected, for those who are on the fringes, and for those who have less. You can’t read this book without realizing that our lives don’t belong to us and they’re no longer supposed to be lived the way the world lives them.

I have been convicted myself this past week of not doing enough to structure my life to make room for the people that God is burdened for. I don’t make financial decisions based off the fact that people around me are hungry or people overseas are starving. I don’t. I don’t make plans for my schedule based around the fact that people need mentors, they need friends, they need solid relationships, and there are people in our communities that could use someone’s time, love, and compassion. We’ve said before that the Body of Christ is called to help people find Shalom in the spiritual, personal, social, and material parts of their lives.

A Jewish work - the book of Tobit that was written 50 or more years before Jesus can also be found in the Catholic Bible and Jesus might’ve known about it. There’s this passage that says

“Prayer with fasting is good, but better than both is almsgiving with righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than wealth with wrongdoing. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold. For almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life, but those who commit sin and do wrong are their own worst enemies. ([Tobit 12:8](#))...

And Polycarp – a very early church father who sounds like a pokemon once wrote or the importance of almsgiving and lists it with things like faith, love, and unity.

“These, then, are the things in which you must stand firm and follow the Lord's example: be steadfast and immovable in the faith; love the brotherhood; cherish one another; be united in the truth; with the meekness of the Lord give precedence to one another; despise no one. When able to do a work of charity, do not put it off; for almsgiving delivers from death.”

So Jesus says, if you're generous to the poor, everything will be clean for you. Not because we're earning our forgiveness but because it takes a new heart to reflect God's heart.

Is this a price you're willing to pay?

Let me end by saying this. The cost of Being Good is a no brainer. You give your debt to God and he erases it, you give your sin to God and he redeems it, you give your weakness to God and he gives you his power, You give all of yourself to God and He gives you His Spirit. You give your bondage to God and He gives you Freedom. You give your blindness to God and He gives you sight. You give your darkness to God and He gives you Light. You give everything that you have to God and you find that God intended all along to make you more yourself than you've ever been before. Pour the cup out, Give the cup to God, clean the cup with God, and you'll find that your cup overflows.

No one who has ever given his life to Christ has ever walked away with the short end of the deal.