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Q&A#75 Beatitudes and Woes

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Today's question: "In your video on the Sermon on the Mount you mentioned a parallel between the Beatitudes and the Woes of Matthew 23. Could you elaborate on this?"

To read more about the parallel between Beatitudes and Woes, see this article by James Jordan: <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-horizons/no-4-the-beatitudes-and-woes/>. For more on the typological structure of Matthew, see Peter Leithart's article on the subject (<https://d3r27erqw8vyds.cloudfront.net/uploads/edd/2015/09/jesus-as-israel-the-typological-structure-of-matthew-s-gospel.pdf>), or the recently released first volume of his Matthew commentary: <https://amzn.to/2yqGogJ>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account: <https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, in your video on the Sermon on the Mount, you mentioned a parallel between the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 and the Woes of Matthew 23. Could you elaborate on this? Yes, the teaching of Jesus publicly, the first public sermon that we read, although he was teaching publicly before, we don't have a record of it, the actual content, begins with the Beatitudes, the Blessed.

Blessed are those who, blessed, etc. And it ends, the final public teaching that Jesus gives is given in Matthew 23. After that, all the teaching is private, given to his disciples alone.

And that ends with a series of Woes. And so this book ends to Jesus' public teaching ministry. The Blesseds and the Woes.

The Blessings and the Curses. And these are paralleled. I originally got this from James Jordan, who has a Biblical Horizons piece on it, which I'll link in the notes.

And he got it from one of his correspondents, Marguerite Lane from Grand Rapids. The parallels are as follows. There are eight Beatitudes, Blesseds, and there are eight Woes.

And the parallels are as follows. The first is, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And the parallel with that is, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men.

For you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. So the contrast is very clear with those who are poor in spirit, who will receive the kingdom of heaven, and the scribes and the Pharisees who don't receive the kingdom of heaven themselves and shut it up against others as well. The second, Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

And here we have a textual question, whether this verse should be included. But I think this parallel gives weight to it. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers.

Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. So the first one is, Blessed are those who mourn. And the second is, Cursed are those who pray upon the mourners, upon the widows, upon those who have been bereaved.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. And that's contrasted with, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you travel land and sea to win one proselyte. And when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

So those who are meek inherit the earth. The Pharisees and the scribes are far from meek, and they will travel the whole earth to win one proselyte. And when they win him, they will make him twice as much a son of hell, someone who will inherit destruction rather than life.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Woe to you, blind eyes, who say, Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing. But whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.

Fools and blind, for which is greater the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing. But whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it. Fools and blind, for which is greater the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by all things on it, etc.

And so this contrast is less obvious than the others, but I think it's related to the Pharisees and the scribes, their hungering and thirsting for material wealth and their neglect of righteousness. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you paid tithes of mint and anise and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith.

These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone. So the contrast here is quite obvious, that those who are merciful will obtain mercy and those who are merciful are those who have not neglected the weightier matters of the law, whereas the scribes and the Pharisees are those who neglect the weightier matters of the law, who will deal with all the minutiae of the law and ignore the things that really matter. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Contrast here, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. So obvious parallel and contrast with being pure in heart, someone who's maintaining the outward appearance and not actually cleansing the inside and so the need to be pure in heart.

And those who are pure in heart will see God, those who do not purify their hearts will not. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

Even so, you also appear outwardly righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. And so this again is less obvious. I think the parallel is, or the contrast is because that the uncleanness and the death as opposed to being associated with being sons of God.

They have dead men's bones and all uncleanness, whereas the peacemakers have health inside. And then the final woe, the eighth woe, is associated with the eighth blessing. The eighth blessing is, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. And the concluding woe is woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous and say, if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

Therefore, you are witnesses against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure of your father's guilt. Serpents, brood of

vipers, how can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, 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. That on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zacharias son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

And so that's the concluding woe. And the concluding woe again brings up themes of sonship. The preceding blessing was sons of being sons of God.

And this is sons of those who kill the prophets. And it's associated with those who are blessed, who are persecuted, and their blessing is associated with the fact that their fathers, the prophets were also persecuted. And here, those who received the woes are associated with those who killed the prophets who received the blessing.

And then the final word is, O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. See, your house is left to you desolate.

For I say to you, you shall see me no more till you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And so this is the final indictment that you have these bookends of the teaching of Christ in Matthew, the public teaching of Christ in Matthew. The first sermon begins with a series of blessings and the last one begins with a series of, ends with a series of curses.

But the final word is that you will not see me again till you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. So it restores all these, all these themes are in play again. And I think this creates a very strong connection between the end of the book and the beginning of the book.

Now, is this part of a greater chiasm? I'm not sure. There are certainly parallels between the end and the beginning of the book. The book begins with a genealogy, ends with a commissioning to go out and form disciples.

So Christ is the son of all these figures and Christ's disciples, the sons of God that will be formed through the ministry of the disciples and the apostles. That seems to be some parallel. Then there's the parallel between Jesus being born of Mary and his father being Joseph and then Joseph and Mary being involved in the burial of Christ and the resurrection event.

And so the resurrection paralleled with the birth with figures like Joseph and Mary in both places. Joseph of Arimathea in the second one and Mary Magdalene, whereas Joseph and

Mary, the parents of Christ in the first. Then you could have things like the killing of the firstborn, the killing of the firstborn associated, of the killing of the sons by Herod associated with the death of Christ.

We could have events such as the testimony of John associated with Christ's witness in his trial, the temptation, the testing of Satan with his struggle in the garden and other things like that. There would seem to be a number of parallels here. To actually develop it into a full-fledged chiasm, it would take a bit more work and build in.

I think that Peter Lighthouse has done some helpful work on this, but he thinks more in terms of a typological structure that moves through the book, which also helps to understand what's taking place here. So what we have is the first word, which brings a series of blessings, and the final word, which brings a series of curses, followed by private teaching to the disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem, which is the final note on which the public teaching ends. That, I think, has a very nice way of bookending the whole ministry of Christ and highlighting just how integral this condemnation upon Jerusalem is and how important the prophetic theme, the prophets being sent and then the son being sent, how important that theme is and how important the rejection of Jerusalem and the consequences of that are within Matthew's theology.

This development also works through the book as we see a movement from Abraham, the calling of Abraham, Joseph going into Egypt, and Joseph as a dreamer going into Egypt, Moses coming out of exile and going back to the land. We have the encounter with angels and dreams, then we have these themes that develop through the book, leading to Moses giving the law and the association of that with the Sermon on the Mount and how this develops through the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, David, and these other figures towards this destruction of the temple, which is associated with the original destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem. And then in the Great Commission, we harken back to the end of the Hebrew Bible in the end of Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, where we read the proclamation of Cyrus.

Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, all the kingdoms of the earth, the Lord God of heaven has given me and he has commanded me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? May the Lord, his God be with him and let him go up.

And so the book of Matthew ends with the Great Commission, which is paralleled with the end of the Hebrew Bible in 2 Chronicles. Putting all this together, I think Matthew has a fairly tight structure and there are many different structures that we can find within it. But this connection and juxtaposition of the woes and the blessings brings into mind the

deeper covenantal themes that are playing beneath Israel's history.

The woes that led to the downfall of the kingdom and their connection with the blessings. And we see that played out in the end of Deuteronomy as these woes and these blessings are listed at that point. And here in Matthew, Christ's ministry is structured around these things.

There's a lot more that could be said, but I hope this helps. If you have any further questions, please leave them in my Curious Cat account. If you would like to support this and future videos, please do so using my Patreon account.

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