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Woe to Scribes and Pharisees (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg examines Jesus' critique of the Pharisees, focusing on their externalism and lack of right priorities in religious practice. Jesus warns the scribes and Pharisees of their hypocrisy, greed, and complicity in the persecution of prophets, predicting the impending destruction of the temple and the need for internal conformity to God's will. The metaphor of the whitewashed tomb illustrates how the Pharisees appeared clean on the outside but were defiled within. Ultimately, Steve Gregg highlights the importance of humility and inward transformation as the true markers of faithful adherence to God's will.

Transcript

...you could choose as an oath, would somehow absolve you of your responsibility to be honest before God. And he says something very much like that here also. Okay, verse 23.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy, and faith or faithfulness. These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone, blind guides who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. Now, there's a statement very much like this in Luke 11, 42.

It's worded only a little bit differently. Perhaps enough so that we could take a look at it. It's the same statement, the same concept at least, but the wording is a little different.

In Luke 11 and 42 it says, but woe to you, Pharisees, for you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without leaving the other undone. You can see it's almost the same statement.

The difference is that Matthew has him saying, you pay tithe of mint, anise, and cummin. Well, that's kind of covered in Luke's version by all manner of herbs. Mint and rue and all manner of herbs.

And then what they pass by or what they neglect, Matthew says, are the weightier

matters of the law. And identifies them as justice, mercy, and faith or faithfulness. Whereas those virtues are summarized as justice, which he agrees with Matthew, but in place of mercy and faithfulness and the love of God.

You pass by justice and the love of God. Probably Luke's version covers the same breadth as the two great commandments mentioned by Jesus. Love your neighbors as yourself and love God with all your heart.

Love of God is your love for God. Justice is your love of your neighbor. Treating your neighbor justly as you would desire yourself to be treated.

And so essentially the weightier matters of the law are just the same things as Jesus called the two great commandments. Justice is the way you deal with your brother in love. And the love of God has to do with your love for God.

Now in Matthew's version, the virtues that are said to be the weightier matters of the law are justice and mercy and faithfulness. And I've said on other occasions that that's just another way of saying love. Because love isn't a way of feeling primarily.

Love is a way of relating and dealing with human beings. And the components of loving behavior in relationships are to be just, to be merciful, and to be faithful. And we don't have time to expound on that today.

I've talked about it before. And I feel that even in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus unpacks that even a little more. Giving examples of justice and mercy and faithfulness as being the important matters of the law.

Anyway, it's along these same lines that he says, you blind guide, you strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. The idea is, a gnat was an unclean animal. Some insects were clean.

A grasshopper could be eaten, but a gnat could not. A gnat was an unclean animal. And because the Jews were meticulous not to eat any unclean food, if a gnat flew into their drink, they'd certainly not drink it down with their drink.

Now, we wouldn't either probably, but that's because we'd be repulsed by taking an insect into our bodies perhaps. Some of us get over that squeamishness. I dare say some of us might even drink it down without getting the gnat out.

If a tiny little ant falls into your cereal bowl and disappears there, I don't know how many of you would throw out the cereal bowl, or how many of you would just eat it and not worry about it because you can't find it. But I think I've become a little less squeamish as the years go by about things like that myself. And I dare say that there'd be some situations I might even drink a cup of something even if I knew a gnat had gone into it.

But the Jews wouldn't under any circumstances, not because of their repulsion at eating an insect, but because it was an unclean animal and it would make them ceremonially in violation of their law. They're not allowed to ingest unclean animals. But he says the irony of it is that while you would strain out a gnat, you in essence swallow a camel, another unclean animal, but of immense proportions.

The idea being that you avoid minor violations of the law while at the same time committing major violations of the law. And that's his way of illustrating in an almost humorous imagery what he had said in the previous verse, verse 23. You are careful to keep some laws, paying your tithes, even of your herbs.

And the reason he brings that out is because the tithe law essentially had to do with giving one-tenth of your grain. Most people were farmers and their income was measured in grain. So a lot of times the tithe that was brought to the temple was in the form of grain.

And grain was generally produced in large quantities, acres and acres of it. That's how they made their living off it. Therefore, to take a tenth of the grain would be a significant amount of grain to be given to the priests.

Herbs, however, were not usually grown in large quantities. They were grown in the window boxes in small points just for the spicing of their food. And therefore, there would be some question as to whether tithing of the herbs would be necessary.

They were grown in small quantities, not that significant. But the Pharisees wanted to make sure they didn't violate the tithe law in any respect. So they would not only tithe of such things that they had in large quantities, but of even the little inconsequential things.

They were very careful not to violate the tithing law in any respect. In that respect, it's like straying a gnat out of their dream. Now, it was good for them to stray a gnat out of their dream.

It's good that they didn't want to break the law. But the problem is, at the same time they were keeping this lesser law, or keeping the law in this small way, they were neglecting the law in a big way. They were neglecting the weightier matters of the law.

It was like swallowing a camel, which would be like a larger violation of the same kind. It's an unclean animal. And so he's basically pointing out their inconsistency and their lack of right priorities.

They're very careful about things that don't matter much, but very careless about the things that matter most to God. And that's, of course, what religion often degenerates into. In the hands of human leadership without the Holy Spirit, there's always the tendency for all religion to devolve into mere forms, rituals, and traditions that maybe in

a former generation reflected real life and real love for God, that some previous generation had come up with the practice of rising early.

John Wesley got up at 4.30 every morning, and he required all the leaders of his Wesleyan Methodist societies to rise at 4.30. It was required to pray. Of course, when John Wesley was 83, he complained that he couldn't get up at 4.30 anymore. In fact, he couldn't get up any earlier than 5.30 to pray, and he complained that for the rest of his life, from age 83 on until his death, he couldn't rise any earlier than 5.30 to pray.

But when he was youthful, under 83, that is, he rose at 4.30 every morning and required others to do so. No doubt, that practice in his life was a true expression of his love for God and of his genuine piety. But when the next generation of Methodists practiced the same thing, it may not have been a true reflection of what was going on in their spiritual lives.

It was more something that had become normative in the group. It had become a standard to be lived up to. And rising at 4.30 in the morning is not in itself virtuous.

Prayers offered at 4.30 are not necessarily going to reach the throne more effectively than prayers offered at 6.30 in the morning, although they'll get there a couple of hours earlier. But they're not better prayers, necessarily. And that's just one of many dozens of examples probably we could think of where something that was a reflection of a true love for God in somebody's life, in a later generation, admiring that person's example, they follow it as a tradition, but it ceases to have any relevance to their relationship with God.

Religion tends to devolve into that, and eventually the real love for God and the real love for neighbor begins to take a back seat to conformity to the rituals, which have become the norm and the tradition. Okay, verse 25. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside they're full of extortion and self-indulgence.

Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of it may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you're like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so, you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you're full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Here he's criticizing them for the externalism of their religious lives, that they maintain an outward appearance of cleanness and kosherness, but inside their whole motivations, their whole thought life is totally different than they appear on the outside and is totally unclean and unkosher inside of God. They focus on outward conformity and not on inward conformity to the will of God. Now, the illustrations he gives, I read both of them because they're both making the same point.

They did wash their cups and bowls and their plates and their tables and everything before they ate. We've been told that in Mark chapter 7 earlier, the Jews had this custom of washing just about everything, for ceremonial cleanness purposes, not just because it was what we would call dirty, but to make it ceremonially clean and to meet the requirements of their ceremonies, they'd wash all these things. Jesus said, however, that when it comes to their own lives, the only sense in which they clean up their lives is on the outside.

It's as if they were going to cleanse their cup before drinking out of it, but they neglected to clean the inside. That they had a cup full of sewage, it may be, but on the outside they made sure there wasn't a spot. They cleaned up all the outside surface of the cup, but inside it was full of garbage.

It was full of sewage. It was full of that which is abomination to drink. Exactly how much attractiveness would such a cup have, though it were clean on the outside, it would still be repulsive.

If somebody served you a glass of sewage and there wasn't a spot on the outside of the cup, it was totally clean on the outside of the cup, I doubt if you'd even pay attention to the fact that the outside was clean. The inside would be so much more foul and so much more commanding of your revulsion that the fact that the outside was clean wouldn't make a difference at all. And whitewashed tombs refers to apparently a practice that was done in Jerusalem and Judea near the time of festivals, when pilgrims from outside the area would be coming to Jerusalem.

Tombs were often caves. And as you know, contact with a dead body or to touch a tomb or whatever would make a Jew unclean. It was one of those things that would defile a man under the law if he touched a dead body or bones or went to a funeral even.

If he came that close to death, he was ceremonially unclean for about a week. Now, since a tomb might look like an ordinary cave to somebody who's not familiar with it, and since many pilgrims would come to Jerusalem and Judea at festival time who didn't live around there and wouldn't therefore not be familiar with where the tombs were and which caves were tombs and which were not, and since we know from the story of David that people would sometimes walk into caves for privacy, usually for the sake of relieving themselves or something, in a place that's not very public, they'd go into a cave if there was one nearby and do something, that practice could lead to somebody inadvertently contracting uncleanness if they say, boy, I really got to go to the bathroom. Oh, there's a cave over there.

I'll go use it. And it turns out it's a tomb and they didn't know it. And now they find themselves defiled.

They can't keep Passover. They can't participate in the festival because they're now

unclean. Well, to prevent that kind of thing from happening, as the Passover season would approach or the other festival seasons, along the major routes that pilgrims came, certain persons from Judea would go out and they would whitewash the outsides of caves that had dead bodies in them that were tombs.

This was, of course, to be a signal to people who didn't know otherwise that this is not an ordinary cave. This is a tomb. If you touch it, it'll make you unclean because there's dead men's bones in there.

And that was, from what I've read, something that was practiced at the time. Now, Jesus gives an example from that and says, you guys remind me of these tombs that are whitewashed. It looks so tidy and with a fresh coat of white paint.

A tomb looks so clean and so nice, but inside it's just as defiling as before you painted it. What's defiling about it, a contact with it, is what's in it. The bones inside are unclean and they are defiling and anyone who comes into contact with them is defiled and you are like that.

People who come into contact with you are defiled even though you may whitewash your behavior on the outside. Inside, you're full of that which defiles. Dead men's bones, like a tomb has dead men's bones.

Contact with the Pharisees defiles people. It makes them twice as child of hell as themselves. And therefore, while they may appear clean and nice and religious and scrupulous on the outside, they were nonetheless a defiling influence because of what was inside.

And that's what he says there. By the way, these statements about the washing of the cup and the tombs are found in Luke's parallel. Actually, the one about the cup in Luke chapter 11 is apparently the first woe or the first comment Jesus made against the Pharisees on the occasion that Luke tells of.

Because in Luke 11 verse 15... No, not verse 15, excuse me. My problem here. I'm looking at Mark.

That's my problem. In Luke chapter 15, in verse 37, it says, As he spoke, a certain Pharisee asked him to dine with him. So he went and sat down to eat.

And when the Pharisees saw it, he marveled that Jesus had not first washed before dinner. But the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Foolish ones, did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But rather give alms of such things as you have, then indeed all things are clean to you.

Now this is worded a little differently than the way Matthew has it. Matthew has Jesus

saying, Clean the inside of the cup first, and then the outside will be clean. But here Jesus says it a little differently.

He says, Give alms of all that you have, and then all things will be clean to you. In other words, your outward behavior will be deemed as clean to God when you give alms. But why give alms? Because what they were full of was greed, he said.

Greed and wickedness in verse 39. The corruption that was dominant in their lives was their love of money, their covetousness, their greed. Remember in Luke 16 it says, The Pharisees who loved money jeered at Jesus when he gave one of his parables.

Specifically it says they loved money. So this was the defilement that was in many of them. The inside was corrupt, and the principal element of corruption was their greed and their covetousness.

And he says, Therefore, you've got to clean out your house. You've got to clean up the cup. Give alms.

That's the cure for greed. Give up your money. And then you'll be clean on the outside too.

Right now you clean the outside, but the inside is full of corruption. You've got to get the inside cleaned out. Giving alms was just the way that he advised this man to get his inside, his heart cleaned out, get rid of his greed.

And then you'll be clean on the outside. Then the other one about tombs is quite different in Luke. In Luke chapter 11, verse 44, Jesus said, Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like graves, which are not seen, and men who walk over them are not aware of them.

Now here's a situation where the graves in question are not caves, but apparently under the ground caves. And people, it would appear, who walk through a graveyard not knowing it, because the dead body is not in sight, they might walk over a grave and be defiled by contact with a grave. And the defilement would be inadvertent.

It's the same idea as the whitewashed tombs, but a little different imagery. The idea is what defiles a person is contact with a grave or with the dead. But in one case, Jesus used the image of a tomb that is whitewashed.

Here he uses the idea of a grave that is not evidently a grave. A person is buried underground, the person walking above ground doesn't see it or know it, and they walk over the grave and are defiled. The idea is the same.

People inadvertently defile themselves by contact with you because you don't on the outside appear to be someone who would defile them. On the outside you look clean. On

the outside there's no evidence of your deadly defiling effect.

But it is present anyway because of what's below the surface. Now, Matthew 23 and verse 29. 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. The parallel to this is in Luke 11, 47 and 48.

It's a little different, but the same point is made. In Luke 11, verses 47 and 48, Jesus said, Woe to you, for you build the tombs of the prophets and your fathers killed them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve of the deeds of your fathers, for they indeed killed them and you build their tombs.

Notice he says, you guys are both working on the same project. They do the killing, you do the building of the tombs for the people they killed. You're kind of partners in crime.

Now, I'm sure that the Pharisees and scribes who built the tombs of the prophets did not see their actions as a collaboration with their ancestors. In fact, as Matthew 23's version says, they themselves say, if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have done that. We wouldn't have killed the prophets like they did.

But Jesus in Matthew 23 says, but you are their children and their corruption is running through your veins. In fact, you're going to kill me and you're no different than they are. You're going to fill up the measure of their guilt.

In fact, by killing Jesus, the idea is that the cup of iniquity had been gradually filling for a long time. Every time the blood of a prophet was shed by the Jewish people, it added to their guilt. But their cup was not yet full.

The iniquity of the Jews was not yet full. But it was quickly approaching fullness. In fact, he said, fill up then the measure of your father's guilt.

And he meant by that, kill me and that will be the last straw. Just like in the parable of the vineyard, he said God sent all these messengers to the vineyard keepers. They killed them and beat them up and so forth.

And last of all, he sent his son. And when they killed him, that was the last straw. He sent his armies to wipe them out.

They're going to miserably destroy those wicked men and give the vineyard to someone else. So Jesus is saying something like that here. Your fathers who killed the prophets

were indeed worthy to be called your fathers because you are truly their children.

In fact, you even profess yourselves to be their children. You say, if we had lived in the days of our fathers, oh, so you admit that they are your fathers. Then you bear witness that you are the children of those people who killed the prophets.

Well, let me tell you something. Nothing has changed in the family. Like father, like son.

The apple never falls very far from the tree. You have the same wickedness running through your veins that your fathers had and you're going to demonstrate it as surely as they did. They demonstrated their wickedness by killing the prophets.

You're going to demonstrate that you're just like them by killing me. Go ahead. Make my day.

Fill up the measure of the guilt of your fathers. He said. And he said in verse 33, Serpents, brood of vipers, how can you escape the condemnation of hell? Then he turns to this prediction.

This also is found in Luke 11, though in a little bit different words. Jesus says here in verse 34, Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify.

Some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city. Now, in verse 34 there, it makes Jesus the one who speaks this prediction. In Luke chapter 11, it's kind of interesting, the difference there.

In fact, it's intriguing. Luke 11, 49, it renders it this way. Therefore, the wisdom of God also said, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute.

Now, notice in Matthew 23, 34, Jesus is the one making the statement. In Luke 11, 49, it sounds like he's quoting someone. Therefore, the wisdom of God said this and gives essentially the statement that is attributed to Jesus in Matthew 23.

I'm not sure what he's referring to as the wisdom of God. Usually, he'd say, therefore the scripture says, but he's not quoting any scripture exactly. And it does sound like an oracle of God.

And no one knows for sure exactly what oracle he is quoting. And maybe that's why Matthew renders it as Jesus' own words or whatever. I don't know.

Maybe Jesus said it on an earlier occasion. And he's in Luke 11, 49, quoting himself, saying it was the wisdom of God that made this comment. I said this prophetically as an expression of the mind of God, not of my own opinion or not my own projections of the situation.

But anyway, I can't resolve it. I don't know exactly why the difference exists or what is meant by the wisdom of God saying that in Luke's version. But back to Matthew.

He says that he, Jesus, is going to send prophets, wise men, and scribes. Who are these? They were the ministers in the book of Acts. The apostles, wise men.

There were New Testament prophets. The church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And Jesus said, some of you are going to kill and crucify and you're going to chase them from city to city.

That's what they did to Paul. The Jews followed Paul from city to city, stirring up trouble wherever he went or wherever he had been. Verse 35, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Barakai, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. Now, it might seem a little unfair for Jesus to say to these people that they killed Zechariah, the prophet, when in fact, Zechariah, the prophet, had died hundreds of years before these people were ever born. But it's clear that he's saying that these people are identified in a solidarity with their fathers who killed the prophets.

He says, you are their sons. You admit it. They are your fathers.

You don't disown their deeds. They killed the prophets. You build the tombs.

You decorate the tombs and so forth. And you've never renounced the deeds of your fathers. In fact, you still call them your fathers.

Thus showing that you are of the same spirit as they are, you exist in solidarity with them. And what they have done is going to be held against you because you've never disassociated from them. By the way, this may not be totally relevant, but it's interesting that when we talk about some of the abominable things done by popes during the medieval times, and abominable blasphemies they made, a lot of times people who want to be a little easier on the papacy say, well, but the church hasn't talked that way for a long time.

The popes don't do that anymore. The popes don't burn and kill and put on the rack Protestants anymore. Some of them I think would like to.

They just don't have the political situation that enables them to anymore. But anyway, I don't want to read anything into their minds. Maybe some of them wouldn't.

But that's not the point. What popes have come out and renounced these things and said it was evil? Maybe some have. I'm not aware of it.

But that's the point. There is a solidarity of those who would call themselves popes and

see themselves in a direct apostolic succession from Peter, which would include all the intermediates in between, including the wicked men who held that office and did atrocities. Anyone who would wish to be identified with that line and see himself as a part of a solidarity of that company is kind of associated with the wrong crowd, if you ask me.

And that's what the Jews in Jesus' day were doing. They hadn't killed any prophets recently. In fact, some of them, like John the Baptist, it was Herod who killed John the Baptist.

But they hadn't renounced the deeds of their fathers. They still wanted to be associated with their fathers who had killed the prophets. He says, therefore, what they have done is going to be held against you.

Now, there is a problem in verse 35. And that is the phrase Son of Berechiah. He mentions Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

The problem with this passage is that he's apparently referring to someone else named Zechariah, not the son of Berechiah. Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, was the man who wrote the book of Zechariah in the Old Testament. He was Jeremiah, Zechariah, son of Berechiah, son of Ido, wrote the book of Zechariah.

He wrote it about 400 years before Christ, or 500 years before Christ, actually more like 520 before Christ. But there's no evidence that he died in the manner that Jesus describes. There is, in fact, no record in Scripture at all of the death of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah.

However, there is another Zechariah. In fact, there's 36 of them in the Bible. Zechariah was a very common name in the Old and New Testament.

And there's 36 different men by the name of Zechariah. And a different Zechariah did die in the manner Jesus describes. He was slain by his countrymen in the temple.

He was Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada. If you look at 2 Chronicles 24, it's a sad story about the apostasy of King Joash, because Joash had become a king as a child, and his life had been spared by Jehoiada, the priest. And when Joash was older and Jehoiada was dead, one of Jehoiada's sons, Zechariah, prophesied against some of the sins that Joash was doing, and Joash had him killed.

And it says he forgot the kindness of Jehoiada, Zechariah's father. The story is in verses 20 through 22. It says, And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, the priest, who stood above the people and said to them, Thus says God, Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord? So that you cannot prosper.

Because you have forsaken the Lord, He also has forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and at the commandment of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord, between the temple and the altar. Thus Joash, the king, did not remember the kindness which Jehoiada, his father, had done to him, but killed his son.

And as he died, he said, The Lord look on it and repay. Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, the last prophet that Jesus mentions, if this is who Jesus is referring to, his dying words were, The Lord is going to repay you for this. Now Jesus says, That repayment has come due on this generation.

God is going to require it of this generation. All the blood, from righteous Abel to that of Zechariah, who was slain between the temple and the altar. But there is still the problem of why does Matthew 23, 35 refer to Zechariah as the son of Berechiah? It appears to be a mistake.

Because the description of this man's death that is given here, is the description of the death of Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada. Whereas we have no record in scripture of the death of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah. And one might say it's not very likely that he died in exactly the same way as another Zechariah did.

Now there are several possibilities that have been suggested. One is that Jesus made a mistake. I can't accept that.

I don't believe Jesus ever made a mistake about any subject he ever spoke on. Because he didn't speak his own words, he spoke the words his father gave him. So I can't accept this.

Another is that Jesus actually said these words, but he knew something about the death of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, that's not recorded in scripture. Since there were 36 different men named Zechariah, it is not impossible that two of them might have died in similar fashion. And that Jesus knew this, even though the scriptures did not record it, and therefore mentioned it.

However, that doesn't seem to be a great answer. Because if Jesus is referring to the death of that Zechariah, his audience would not immediately see the validity of his comment. If he said it was Zechariah the son of Berechiah who died this way, because they would understand him to be making a mistake, and it wouldn't carry a lot of weight with them.

They'd be distracted by the fact that he's making a comment that can't be verified, and which they would have no reason to believe that was true since they didn't accept him as the son of God. I don't think that's likely to be what he'd do. Another possibility is there's a textual corruption here.

This is what I think is the most likely thing. It's interesting that in the parallel passage in Luke, which also mentions from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, it doesn't say the son of Berechiah. Luke just has him saying from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah whom you slew between the temple and the altar.

In other words, this phrase, son of Berechiah, is missing from Luke's version of this. Now, either that is because Luke omitted it, recognizing this to be a mistake, a historical mistake, or more likely Luke renders the statement the way it was really made, and some copyist may have accidentally stuck in son of Berechiah thinking that that's the Zechariah that was being discussed. Now, we don't know this to be the case, but let me just say, all things being equal, I would expect a mistake like this to have come from a copyist sooner than come from Jesus.

I mean, someone made a mistake here. Unless Jesus is giving a historical bit of data that is not able to be confirmed from anywhere in the Old Testament, and it just happens to resemble exactly the way that another Zechariah died, I think it's safe, it's probable, that somebody made a mistake here. And the choices are these.

Jesus made a mistake, or Matthew made a mistake in recording it, adding the word son of Berechiah because he was mistaken, or a copyist since the time of Matthew made a mistake copying Matthew and inserted that particular phrase for clarification, but he was wrong. Now, if somebody made a mistake, I'd much sooner say it was a copyist than that it was Jesus or Matthew. For one thing, I believe that Jesus spoke under inspiration.

I believe that Matthew wrote under inspiration. I have no confidence that any copyist after Matthew's time copying his gospel wrote under inspiration. Therefore, it's more likely the mistake was made by a copyist.

It's just the kind of thing, just the very kind of thing that is found in textual corruption. Some copyist wants to clarify a point, and so he puts a little note in the margin, and then someone copying that copy sticks it actually in the text, and then it's in there for good, and all versions later include it. So, either Zechariah, the son of Barakiah, died just the same way as Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, did, and Jesus tells us that, but we have no way to confirm it elsewhere, or else some mistake has entered the text here.

And I'm not inclined to believe that it's either Matthew or Jesus that made the mistake, but it's not hard at all to suggest a scenario where a copyist made a mistake, and the fact that Luke omits it suggests that maybe Luke has preserved it the way Jesus actually said it, and it's Matthew's version that has been corrupted by some copyist error. I'm at least willing to settle for that as the explanation. It makes good sense to me.

Let's take these last verses, 37 through 39. O Jerusalem, 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.

Another verse that doesn't seem to go along with the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace.

God wanted to draw them, but he couldn't because they wouldn't. That's what Jesus said. Now when he says how often I wanted to gather your children, in that expression, how often, there is a whole history of 1400 years previous to Jesus' time that the Israelites had been delivered from Egypt, and God had sought to gather them to himself, but they lived in almost perennial rebellion from three days after the Exodus when they murmured against God because the water was bad, to the ten times they murmured against Moses during the forty years of wandering, and God had to slay most of them in the wilderness, to the periods of the judges where generation after generation of Jews apostatized from God, and he would eventually, because they cried out to him, he'd send judges to deliver them and he'd save them, but then they'd only last as long as the judge lasted.

When he died, they'd go back to their apostasy. Or the period of the kings, or the Babylonian exile, or whatever. You name the period of Jewish history and you'll find that it all is subsumed under this how often.

How often God had tried to gather the Jews to himself and found them unwilling. And what he's saying now is it won't be often anymore. Your house is now being abandoned.

You can have it. Now, Jeremiah, you know, had to address a mistaken notion in his day that the house of God would preserve the nation, the presence of the temple in Jerusalem would preserve the nation against invaders even if the people were apostate. Because, after all, God lived there.

Well, what Jesus is saying is don't count on this house to preserve you against your invaders. He's just said all the bloodshed from righteous Abel to Zechariah is going to come on this generation. This generation is going to see doom.

And having a temple here isn't going to change that. It's not going to preserve you because it's not God's house anymore. He's moved out.

It's your house. You can have it. You can do what you want with it.

You've been doing what you want with it for a long time anyway. Your house has left you desolate. For I say to you, you shall see me no more until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Now, there had been a number of people who had said that very thing a few days earlier when Jesus was riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The children and many of the people waving palm branches said, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. It's possible that Jesus is just saying this to the leaders of Israel who had not been part of that company waving palm branches.

The scribes and Pharisees had in fact told Jesus to rebuke those who were waving palm branches. Lord, Master, Teacher, rebuke your disciples. And he said, No way.

If these were silent, the rocks themselves would cry out. Which suggests that the rocks would be more responsive to him than the Pharisees were because they weren't crying out and the rocks would do so. The Pharisees had hearts harder than stone because stones could be softened enough to praise God.

The Pharisees couldn't be. He may be saying here that while some people have acknowledged me as the one coming in the name of the Lord, you have not yet, you scribes and Pharisees. And that is why you're losing your position.

That's why you're losing your religion, why you're losing your temple. Because you have not joined those who acknowledge me as the Messiah, as the one coming in the name of the Lord. Therefore, your house is left desolate and you're not going to be seeing me anymore.

And he left the temple. And we read in the opening verses of Matthew 24, Jesus went out and departed from the temple and his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple and Jesus said to them, do you not see all these things? Surely I say to you, not one stone should be left here upon another that shall not be thrown down. So he walked out of the temple, the glory departed, it was no longer God's house, Jesus was never to return to the temple and all he had to say about it was, it's coming down.

It's coming down. And of course, the disciples were curious about it, when? When is this going to happen? And then follows his much misunderstood discussion on Mount Olives. And of course, he tells them when it's coming down.

He said in Matthew 24, 34, this generation will not pass before all these things come to pass. So he indicated that the destruction of the temple would be within that generation. Of course, he'd already said that in Matthew 23, verse 36, assuredly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

The destruction, the judgment, was going to happen within, as it turned out, 40 years at the time he uttered the doom. And so, with this passage ends the career of Solomon's temple. Solomon's temple, of course, had been destroyed, but it had been rebuilt in Zerubbabel's day, embellished by Herod.

It had a history of about a thousand years prior to Jesus, but that history was coming to an end. It was no longer going to be a place where God would be worshipped. And Isaiah had said, in Isaiah 66, one and two, he said, you know, heaven is my throne, earth is my footstool, where is the house that you will build for me? He said, for all these things have been, and all these things are my hands made, but to this man will I look, even to him who is of a poor and contrite spirit and who trembles at my word.

So God was no longer going to honor a house made with hands as a place that would be his dwelling among men, but rather people. He'd be dwelling with the humble. He'd be dwelling with people.

Actually, Isaiah 57, 15 also makes the same statement. Isaiah 57, 15, he said, I am the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity. I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a poor and contrite spirit, or a contrite and humble spirit.

That's Isaiah 57, 15. So God in Isaiah of course, these passages in Isaiah are relevant to the church age. He says, you know, God's not going to dwell in temples made with hands forever.

He's going to abandon the temple and move into a spiritual temple made not with hands, but made of people. And then, of course, that's what it's been ever since Jesus walked out of the Jerusalem temple. Which brings us to the Olivet Discourse.