

**(Matt. 23:27-28)** – The Lord continued pronouncing woes upon the false religionists who promoted the false gospel of legalism and salvation conditioned on sinners. Here, He tells them they are *“LIKE UNTO WHITED SEPULCHRES, WHICH INDEED APPEAR BEAUTIFUL OUTWARD, BUT ARE WITHIN FULL OF DEAD MEN’S BONES, AND OF ALL UNCLEANNESS.”* He told them that they *“OUTWARDLY APPEAR RIGHTEOUS UNTO MEN, BUT WITHIN YE ARE FULL OF HYPOCRISY AND INIQUITY.”* Christ had already made it clear that sin was not only a matter of what we do or how we appear, but it was also a matter of the heart (Jer. 17:9; Gen. 6:5; Matt. 15:10-20). This is why we see in the truth of the law and the Gospel, for salvation to be complete, we need a legal clearing of our guilt and a spiritual cleansing of our heart. We need a righteousness that we cannot produce by our efforts to keep the law or to try to be good. The efforts of the scribes and Pharisees made them appear righteous outwardly to men, but it did not make them righteous before God. Christ alone worked out a perfect righteousness by His obedience unto death for His people, and God has imputed HIS righteousness to them (Rom. 10:4; Rom. 4:1-8; 2 Cor. 5:21). Because of our state as fallen in Adam into spiritual death and depravity, we need to be born again by the Spirit (John 3:3-7). We must be given new hearts and new spirits to embrace, receive, and believe in Christ for all salvation and righteousness. Our hearts must be cleansed by the spiritual application of the blood of Christ (Heb. 10:19-22). Appearing outwardly righteous to men will do us no good. It will only lead us to death and hell.

**(Matt. 23:29-32)** – They boasted that they venerated dead prophets and would not have joined those who killed God’s prophets. But they rejected the living prophets of God (John the Baptist, for example) and they rejected the Lord Jesus Christ of Whom all the true prophets of God spoke. *“FILL YE UP THEN THE MEASURE OF YOUR FATHERS”* – It is as if the Lord was telling them to “go ahead and finish what your unbelieving fathers started” in killing God’s true witnesses and killing Him (Matt. 5:12; Acts 7:51; 1 Thess. 2:14-16). Again, they proved their hatred of those who told them the truth (John 15:18–16:3).

**(Matt. 23:33-36)** – The Lord told them essentially the same thing that John the Baptist told them (Matt. 3:7). *“YE SERPENTS, YE GENERATION OF VIPERS”* is a phrase that has the idea of “family of the devil.” These religious leaders took pride in their heritage, thinking they were spiritual sons of Abraham. Instead, they were sons of the devil, not of Abraham (John 8:44). *“HOW CAN YE ESCAPE THE DAMNATION OF HELL?”* The only way to escape the damnation of hell is the way of God’s grace in and by the Lord Jesus Christ alone and based on His righteousness imputed alone. This is the very way they rejected! This is the way they hated as it gave them no room to boast in themselves.

Over their history, the Lord had sent them a few true witnesses of God, and He would send them *“prophets, and wise men, and scribes”* to tell them the truth of salvation by God’s free and sovereign grace in the promised Messiah Who is God manifest in the flesh (Matt. 1:21,23; Luke 2:25-32). Here, He Himself spoke to them of the truth of salvation that could only be found in Him – the glory of His Person and the power of His finished work of redemption to accomplish a perfect righteousness whereby God is just to justify the ungodly. He would send out His disciples to preach this Gospel both in Israel and in the Gentile world, but these false religionists would kill and crucify some of them and scourge others even in their synagogues (John 16:1-3). They *“PERSECUTE THEM FROM CITY TO CITY.”*

*“THAT UPON YOU MAY COME ALL THE RIGHTEOUS BLOOD SHED UPON THE EARTH”* – Christ refers here to all the martyrs of the Old Testament of whom *“ABEL”* was the first (Gen. 4:1-8). *“ZACHARIAS”* was either the prophet Zachariah or another Zachariah mentioned in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. Without going into all the details to show one or the other, the point here for our lesson is that these were Old Testament believers who were martyred for their faith. These scribes and Pharisees who aligned with those who hated Christ and killed His prophets were guilty with all those who did the same.

**(Matt. 23:37-39)** – Christ expresses His sorrow – *“HOW OFTEN WOULD I HAVE GATHERED THY CHILDREN TOGETHER, EVEN AS A HEN GATHERETH HER CHICKENS UNDER HER WINGS, AND YE WOULD NOT!”* There are some serious misconceptions of the Lord’s lament here that serve to deny the plain teachings in the Bible concerning God’s sovereignty in salvation and Christ’s sure salvation of all His people. Some say this shows that Christ is trying to save all without exception but cannot unless they cooperate. Christ is NOT saying here, “I would have saved these children, but you Pharisees stopped me from doing so.” First, He is speaking out of His sinless humanity showing His sorrow for the ruin of physical Jerusalem. Secondly, the Bible is clear, as I have expressed in my comments on Matthew 23:13, that all whom the Father chose and gave to Christ to save eternally will come to Him, and no man can prevent it (John 6:37-45). All for whom Christ died are redeemed and cannot be charged with their sins and condemned (Rom. 8:33-34). They must be given the gifts of spiritual life, faith, repentance, and be preserved unto glory (Rom. 8:28-32). So, this expression of sorrow here is simply the man Christ Jesus expressing His sorrow over the sinfulness and rebellion of those whose sinfulness and unbelief have left Jerusalem *“DESOLATE”* (wasted). *“YE SHALL NOT SEE ME HENCEFORTH, TILL YE SHALL SAY, BLESSED IS HE THAT COMETH IN THE NAME OF THE LORD.”* These were the last words the Lord spoke to the Pharisees. Those of His sheep who would later see Him coming in the name of the Lord would call Him *“BLESSED,”* not cursed. Those vessels of wrath, in the end, would be forced to bow to Him as the Blessed One Who would judge them for their sins and justly condemn them (Acts 17:31).