



Stuff They Didn't Teach Me In Sunday School



Episode 128 - Jesus Seals His Fate—and His Church's Future (Matthew 23, 28)

Taking Aim at the Scribes and Pharisees

The scribes and Pharisees aggressively confronted Jesus because He refused to follow their traditions. At first Jesus was moderate with the Pharisees and scribes, but when they refused to repent He gradually became more firm and direct. Now in His final speech to them, Jesus turns His sights in their direction, hurling seven charges at them. One after another, His powerful words dismantled their carefully crafted show of piety and exposed the hypocrisy lurking inside their hearts.

- Read each of the seven charges Jesus levels at them (Matthew 23:13-14, 15, 17-22, 23-24, 25-26, 27-28, 29-32). Why would Jesus use such a strong attack of God's Law against them?
- As we witness to others, how should we determine how severely we need to bring God's Law and judgment to prepare someone for the good news of God's love, grace, mercy and forgiveness in Jesus Christ?

Having demolished their show of holiness, Jesus ends with these chilling words of judgment: "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?" (Matthew 23:33).

- All their lives the Pharisees have been trying to escape being sentenced to hell by following the traditions of their scribes. With those hopes destroyed by God's Law, what hope do they have left to escape God's judgment?
- Why is it so important for us to realize that our best efforts to earn God's favor will crumble into dust on Judgment Day?

Jesus shows incredible mercy and grace as He answers His own question, "How are you to escape being sentenced to hell?" He continues, "Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes" (Matthew 23:34a) This promise was fulfilled after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. The book of Acts shows the apostles and many believers proclaiming Jesus' salvation throughout Jerusalem, especially to the religious leaders.

- How remarkable is it to you that Jesus continued to be so gracious to these misleaders who had gone so far astray?

Indeed, some of the scribes, Pharisees and priests would believe the message of Jesus' apostles. But Jesus knew and announced that the Jewish leadership would persist in its obstinate unbelief and resistance to God's messengers: "... some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous bloodshed on earth" (Matthew 23:34b-35a).

- What danger do we face if we rely on our own devoutness and refuse to humble ourselves and put our trust in Jesus' righteousness, death and resurrection?

Two Resurrection Accounts:

While Mark gives no account of the resurrection, Matthew offers us two that are somewhat surprising. Jesus appears to the women who had come to properly bury His body on that Sunday after the Sabbath rest. This is remarkable because women were not considered reliable witnesses in the society in that day.

- Why do you think Jesus chose to first reveal Himself to women even though they would not be considered reliable witnesses in a court of that day?

Many of us feel unqualified and intimidated when God gives us opportunities to be witnesses of our faith. "I don't know enough to answer somebody's questions" or "People will never listen to me" are two of several excuses we quickly come up with.

- How does Jesus' choice of witnesses encourage us to speak up?
- Jesus did not send these witnesses to publicly confess, but to go and share what they had seen with His apostles. How might that help clarify our role as witnesses to our families, neighbors and co-workers?

The next resurrection appearance in Matthew is Jesus appearing to His disciples on a mountain in Galilee. Here Jesus gives His Great Commission to guide His disciples and His Church in making disciples. This includes two elements: baptizing and teaching.

- How important is Baptism in God's eyes?
- What are some ways we can hold up Baptism as a precious gift of God to each of us whom He has called?
- After Baptism Jesus commands His apostles to teach His Word. Why do you think Jesus considers teaching so important?

Jesus concludes His appearance on the mountain with a great promise: "... Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b).

- Though Jesus is always with us, we are not always aware of it. Why is it so important for us to remind ourselves of His presence through teaching and the Sacrament of Holy Communion?
- When have you received great reassurance from Jesus' promise?