

Seven Woes to the Prophets and Apostles

Introduction by Johnathan Kingsley

The LDS Church teaches us to liken all scripture unto ourselves. This to me invites us all to take a passage of scripture and insert ourselves into it.

This is an adaptation of Matt 23:13-35, when Jesus calls out the Pharisees and Scribes. When scripture in effect, challenges our assumptions we tend to ignore how we might fit into it and say to ourselves, “Jesus is challenging the Jews but not us, we follow Jesus.” But if we are to liken the scriptures unto us it becomes important to see how we might fit into even the challenging scriptures as well. This makes it more difficult to ignore our shadows and the shadows of any organization we belong to. And when we recognize our dark sides we can more easily integrate it into who we are. This adaptation may insight not so good feelings in some due to the critical nature of the original scriptural passage but I hope the adaptation is consistent to what I believe Jesus was teaching about, which is institutional injustice or structural sin. How do we recognize institutional injustices? Well through Jesus’ example, it seems one way, is through criticism.

Is the LDS Church and it’s leaders above criticism? Father Richard Rohr speaks to self criticism and criticism of the church. He writes “In the Judeo-Christian scriptures, we read about people who found God in the actual, in seemingly secular history, and in mundane daily life. This is the Jewish matrix by which we were gradually prepared for the personal incarnation. It widened, solidified, and paved the runway by which the Jesus Mystery could take off and be understood.

The Hebrew Scriptures, against all religious expectations, include what most of us would call the problem—the negative, the accidental, the sinful—as the precise arena for divine revelation. There are no perfectly moral people in ancient Scriptures; even Abraham drove his second wife into the desert with their child. The Jewish people, contrary to what might be expected, chose to present their arrogant and evil kings and their very critical prophets as part of their Holy Scriptures. They include stories and prophecies that do not tell the Jewish people how wonderful they are but, rather, how

terrible they are! It is the birth of self-critical thinking and thus moves consciousness much higher. No other religion has been known for such capacity for self-criticism, down to our own time.

Jesus showed us that self-criticism of our own religion is necessary. But if we are honest, we rarely hear the Christian Church or its leaders being self-critical. Christianity has seldom been known for any capacity to criticize itself until the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s. Usually we just criticize others. I remember when I asked a professor about Jesus' tirades against religion and the priestly class (in Matthew 23, for example), and the typical answer was, "Well, he was talking about the Jews." Surely not us!

The ability to think critically about ourselves is the first necessary step out of the dualistic mind. It teaches us an initial patience with ambiguity and mystery, while also teaching us rational honesty. Such critical thinking is a characteristic of the Western mind which produced the scientific and industrial revolutions, as well as the Protestant Reformation. The Jewish and Christian religions have the power to correct themselves from inside, and move beyond mere superstition, because of these kinds of sacred and self-critical texts. Jesus lived and taught in the genre of a prophet, but Christians have over-emphasized that he was simply "foretold" by the prophets. This changed the way we thought about the role of a prophet, and so we couldn't see that Jesus truly was a radical prophet. There are many churches called "Christ the King," but none, that I'm aware of, called "Jesus the Prophet."¹

In contrast within the Tradition of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints , a leader of the church , Elder Oaks has stated "It's wrong to criticize leaders of the Church even if the criticism is true."

Father Richard also speaks about institutional sin from the liberation theology perspective writing, "The Exodus story is the root of all liberation theology, which Jesus then teaches and fully exemplifies (see Luke 4:18-19). It is obvious that he is primarily a healer of the poor and powerless. Liberation theology focuses on freeing people from religious, political, social, and economic oppression (i.e., what Pope John Paul II called

“structural sin” and “institutional evil”). [1] It goes beyond just trying to free individuals from their own naughty behaviors, which many people identify as the only meaning of sin. In our individualistic society, structural sin is accepted as good and necessary on the corporate or national level. Large companies, churches, and governments get away with and are even applauded for killing (war), greed, vanity, pride, and ambition. The capital sins are rewarded at the corporate level but shamed at the individual level. This is our conflicted Christian morality!”²

So Why do I think Jesus in Matt 23 is speaking to institutional sin rather than individual sin? It is partly because of the generality used to refer to the leadership of the Jewish sects of his time in the plural (Pharisees and Scribes). This use of the plural causes me to consider that He is critiquing the the religion and its sects as a whole, not at the individual level. It could be seen that He is challenging and critiquing the institutional injustice He saw around Him. But this to me should be broadened to include a critique of any organization or institution then or now. There will always be corruption in some degree or another in any organization. Jesus is calling attention to this and it just happened to be that he was most familiar with the Jewish organizations in his time. I don't see this as a dig just at the Jewish tradition of Jesus' time but of all religious traditions and corporations at any time.

Yet when we are thriving in an organization or a church, we often turn a blind eye to the injustice that goes on within. Jesus' critiques in this passage are sharp and direct and I try to stay true to that form.

References

1. <https://cac.org/self-critical-thinking-2016-02-25/>
2. <https://cac.org/roots-of-liberation-2018-06-24/>

7 Woes to the Prophets and Elders:

An adaptation of Matthew 23:13-35

By Johnathan Kingsley

"But woe to you, Prophets and Elders hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in."

"Woe to you, Prophets and Elders hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single convert and when he becomes converted, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves."

"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the Bible , it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the Book of Mormon, he is bound by his oath.'

You blind fools! For which is greater, the Book of Mormon or the Bible on which the Book of Mormon depends?

And you say, 'If anyone swears by the greater Christian tradition it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints he is bound by his oath.

You blind men! For which is greater, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or the greater Christian tradition, that Great Mother who gave birth to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints?

So whoever swears by the Book of Mormon swears by it and by the Bible which preceded it.

And whoever swears by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints swears by it and by the greater Christian tradition from which it originated.

And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it."

"Woe to you, Prophets and Elders hypocrites! For you tithe ten percent of a years wages and command fast offerings and many more offerings and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and Love. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!"

"Woe to you, prophets and Elders hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

You blind Elders. First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean."

"Woe to you, Prophets and Elders, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

"Woe to you, Prophets and Elders hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the innocent and decorate the monuments of the righteous,

saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the innocent at mountain meadows.'

Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered those at mountain meadows and do so without apology and go so far as to say the Church does not apologize for anything.

Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.

You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

Therefore I send you prophets and wisdom teachers and intellectuals, some of whom you will disfellowship and excommunicate, and some you will slander in your churches and conferences and persecute from town to town,

so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of the LGBT youth for whom you create policies of exclusion causing many to harm themselves even unto death and then realizing your error, reverse the policy without apology and say that both are revelations from God.

I say to you how then can the Church repent? Oh how can the Church repent."