



## **King Jesus-Part 9**

### **Guarding Against His Usurpers**

#### **Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Perhaps you are familiar with the work of the Michigan Lawsuit Abuse Watch, the Michigan Lawsuit Abuse Watch. If you are familiar with their work it's probably because of their annual contest that they hold in trying to find the most unnecessary warning label in the country. I think the first year they held this contest, the winner was the Travel Light Folding Stroller that had a prominent warning label, "Caution: please remove child before folding." "Carlynn, did you take Johnny out of the stroller before you put it in the van?" She replied, "Oh no. That's right." I mean, it's just never a problem I think in our household. Speaking of Johnny, the Bosh dishwashers, which I happened to actually buy one of those for our kitchen. It comes with the warning label that says, "Caution! Do not allow children to play in dishwasher." "Where's Johnny? I think he's in a dishwasher again. He's playing in the dishwasher." Absurd. One of my favorites, on a box of Band-Aids. Go home, look at your box of Band-Aids. On the outside of the box it'll say, "Caution! For external use only." I've never been tempted to swallow a Bandaid for a stomach ache. Right? When you bite your tongue, I've never try to put one on my tongue. I don't understand that. Duraflame logs. "Caution! Risk of fire." I hope there's more than a risk of fire when I buy my Duraflame logs. One of my favorites is at Staples, the little letter opener. Do you remember those plastic letter openers? It's got the little slit in it and you put it in your envelope and open up your envelope. Just a little plastic thing. On the back of the cover, you know, the little sealed cover, it says, "Caution! Goggles recommended." I'm glad they're not required. Walking into my assistant, Ruth's, office and watching her opening letters with goggles on. I just think that's what I envision, that's recommended. I recommend you put on goggles when you use our letter opener. Worst of all, for you University of Michigan fans, I know you basketball fans were watching them last night, in the sports arena, I'm told, of the University of Michigan, I think it's the Chrysler arena, over the back of the toilets, it says, "Recycled water. Unsafe for drinking." Are the U of M students really tempted to drink out of the toilet? These are all verifiable, look them up, and the winning verified submission each year for the Michigan Lawsuit Abuse Watch, they give them a check for \$500 and also, along without that, a book that they love at that Abuse Watch law firm there, it's called "The Death of Common Sense" and I think that's appropriate. Not only the book itself but the title of the book, because most of us could get rid of most warning labels in our country just with a little common sense. No one needs to be told to take the child out of the stroller before you put it in the back of the van. Those are ridiculous warning labels and yet you'd agree, wouldn't you, that some warning labels are necessary and you'd better have one.

If I took you up to the Orange County Airport this afternoon, introduce you to a flight instructor and I want to teach you how to fly, if he sat there before he gave you the controls of the plane and gave you several warnings about things that you should and should not do, I think you would really understand those to be essential. I mean you'd say, well those are important.

Well, before you navigate your spiritual life, Jesus has some warnings for you and he's not afraid of lawsuits, he's not superfluous with his words, he's not wasting time. When he gives warnings, you know those are much more important. Matter of fact, those are essential. They are more important than getting warnings as you sit in the cockpit of a plane about to take off as the pilot. These warnings are the difference between the success in your spiritual life or its failure. Jesus, in the three verses that we're going to look at this morning, he takes time to give us a warning. It's not unnecessary, it is



essential. You, this morning, may or may not heed this warning but if you don't it'll be to your own peril. You may really wreck your entire life if you don't take heed to these warnings.

So, I want you to look at these with me in Luke Chapter 20 verses 45 through 47, we're going to look at Jesus' words. It's a very short section but it stands on its own as we look at Jesus there on the Temple Mount as he's been teaching people, three groups of people, who were hanging on his words. His disciples, and it's not just the Twelve Apostles but a group of people who really were imbibing in his words, there was the crowds there then and there was a mixed crowd, and then in the back, as I always picture it, were the scribes, the Pharisees, the teachers of the Law, the elders of Jerusalem, and they were constantly trying to discredit him in the two days that we have him teaching here on the Temple Mount in the week leading up to his crucifixion. As they're there trying to discredit him, as you remember, he finally silenced them with all of his wise and tight answers to their questions and he put them in their place. And then he had a question for them last week, that we looked at, to clarify who he was, that was so important to know who he is before he goes to the cross to secure our redemption.

And after that, then he warns the people. Take a look at this with me beginning in verse 45. Notice the audiences here, "In the hearing of all the people," so there's the crowd, "he said to his disciples," those who were willing to listen and hang on his words. "Beware of the scribes." A strong verb, a verb that I think is useful to understand, at least in its grammatical context. In Greek, we've got five tenses. The tense that is chosen for this verb is that "continuative tense," always beware, and the compound of this word "beware" it's made up of two Greek words, it has that sense of having your mind constantly held on this as a vigilant concern, continually keep your mind wary and concerned about this. In this case, he names a group of people, the scribes.

Now the parallel passage in Matthew 23 gives us the breadth of this. It's not just the scribes, he's picking them in the immediate context because he was just sparring with them in terms of the question and answer, but the religious leaders of the day, which were more than the scribes, the teachers of the Law, the Pharisees. And he says, here are some things about them.

Now we're supposed to figure out why we're supposed to be careful of them and beware of them. There's a lot of background we need and we'll get to that, but he says, here's some things about them. "They like to walk around in long robes," which on the surface, like, I don't understand, what's wrong with that? "They love greetings in the marketplace." Don't you? "The best seats in the synagogue." Of course, I'd like the best seats. "Places of honor at feasts." That would be nice. Now, it gets to be obvious, verse 47, that it's bad here. "They devour widows' houses." That's an analogy. Well, they're not eating the corners of the house, but apparently that's bad, they're doing something to exploit these vulnerable people in Israel. "And for a pretense," now we get to see their hypocrisy, "they make long prayers," and here is what he says about them, "They will receive the greater condemnation."

So, he says here's a group of people. Here's the one, imperative verb, "beware," watch out, be careful. And he says, here's the things you can see in their lives. Now that's not true of every last scribe. We've seen some good scribes in the Gospel of Luke, but many of them were characterized by this along with the Pharisees, as Matthew 23 reminds us. They got all these things going on in their lives, and then he says, they're in really big trouble.

Now why would Jesus warn us about them? Well, certainly in the first century, that group of people



known as the scribes, they were people who were doing things that were not pleasing to God and so, for us to look at them and say, "Well, they're bad people, there's no real warning in that." The real warning is don't be like them, don't be influenced by them, don't be listening to them, don't take what they say and do what they're doing if what they're doing or saying is not right if it's not biblical. This is a warning for you because you, if you become this, you're going to receive the greater condemnation. Beware.

Now Jesus uses that verb about this group of people and we'll look at that in a minute. But number one on your outline, if you have your worksheet out, if you downloaded it this morning, I want you to beware, not of them quite yet, I want you to be aware of the absence of people saying you ought to beware. Let's put it down this way. I'm not trying to be cute, this is very important. We need to "Beware When There Are No Warnings." And I say that to the 21st century church that I preach to, that in our evangelical circles that's something really we don't want to do. It's passé. It's not acceptable, it's not loving, it's not charitable for us to look at a group of people and say, "Beware of them."

Now I know what you're thinking, because you've grown up in church, many of you, or you've been around church long enough to know the scribes, the Pharisees, the teachers of the Law, we immediately hear those words and we think, "Oh, those are the bad guys," and we picture them as some caricature of what they are. But be careful, they're not obviously bad people. I mean they're bad from our perspective because we've read the story and we know they end up crucifying Christ. But they were people who were revered and respected and the average person would look to them and say, "Well, these are godly guys. They're important people, they're teaching the Bible."

This is not like the Dawkins and the atheists of the day. These were people talking about you living for God and he says you've got to be careful of these people. Now, one thing you know is going to get you in trouble in our generation is if you, as a Christian, look across at another group of people talking about God or, in our case, Jesus Christ, and you start saying, "Hey, be careful of them. Watch out for them. They're doing the wrong thing. Don't listen to them." You start acting like that, this factionalism, this kind of, you know, watch out, you're going to kind of be labeled a heresy-hunter. Right? Don't get into that.

I just want to tell you this. if you just read the New Testament, it is filled with warnings. Warnings for you to watch out, not just for bad doctrine, but people who hold that bad doctrine, watch out for them. Be careful, beware of that group. In other words, you need to filter what they say, or better yet, in some cases, just avoid them altogether. If you have a church, if you have a group of people, if you have a movement, if you have a school, if you have a Christian organization, if you read a Christian book and there are no warnings there about what you need to watch out for, then they're not living in the real world, or they're pretending they're not living in the real world. Because the Bible reminds us that we ought to be warning one another and your Christian leaders who you choose to follow and sit under ought to be warning you.

Here's a passage we're going to try to identify with that warning. We don't have scribes walking around but we've got an equivalent of people that meets this criteria, in the bottom verse 46 and the top of verse 47, who do these things. We need to look at that and we need to say, "OK we got to be careful of that." That warning is important. Jot this reference down if you would, Second Peter Chapter 2 verse 1. This is the perennial reminder that we are not just looking at a first century problem, but a 21st century



problem, because here is the prophetic word of God. Ready?

Second Peter 2:1, "But false prophets also arose among the people," we're speaking now of the Old Testament, the false prophets of the Old Testament, "just as there WILL BE false teachers among you, and they will secretly bring in destructive," here's the word, "heresies." I know we don't like talk about heresy, we don't like to talk about people who are bad or who are wrong or are misguided. Certainly, if they're wearing the Jesus Jersey we want them on our team.

But the Bible says, you need to be careful, because there will always be, in the Church of Jesus Christ, people wearing the Jesus Jersey who will be introducing, not blatantly, not obviously, here's the word, "secretly they will bring in destructive heresies." Heresy. Even that word, it means to take a part of the whole, which we call orthodoxy, something that is right and true that Jesus taught, and they take a part of it, a section of it, a facet of it, a slice of it and they take that and they say, "Well we're not going to worry about that part." Matter of fact, they often replace it with something else and say, "Well we don't like that part of what the Bible teaches, we don't like that part about what Jesus said, we just like this part."

It's not that they're teaching lies. They're actually teaching a lot that is true. They wear the Jesus Jersey, they talk about God, they have churches, they have Bibles, they write Christian books, they go on Christian talk shows and radio shows and TV shows and they say a lot of things that most of you would say, "Well, they say good things." They do say good things. But there's a section and a part of what they teach that's not just a misguided concept or opinion about a tertiary or secondary issue, it's something that is secretly put in there that it will be destructive to us. And if you look at this list, which we're about to in a minute in Luke Chapter 2 versus 46 and 47, you're going to recognize, this is very subtle.

It is secretly brought into our lives because, in many ways, people look just past that in their minds and I'll get to that in a minute. But let me remind you of this, that every good thing that God is doing in the world will be assaulted by God's enemies and God's enemies are not wearing a shirt or a jersey that says, "I'm God's enemy."

Jot this down if you would, John Chapter 8 verses 43 and 44 when he says to them, listen you're not buying what I'm saying. "You're not bearing my words, because you are in alignment with," here's the word, "the devil," the diabolos, the opponent. Now you'd think the opponent would wear a jersey that says, "I'm an opponent," but he doesn't. Why? Because he comes in, as it says in Second Corinthians 11, as an angel of light, a messenger of truth, and here's what the Bible says, the devil, the diabolos, the people that are aligned with him will do the will of Satan. And here's what Satan is all about. He's a murderer, he's a destructive person, he wants to destroy our relationship with God, our progress in sanctification, our good standing with Christ. In some way, he wants to get what we believe about the truth and he wants to malign that. And he'll do that, here's the method, through lying. Listen to this. He says, "He does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

There are books, there are programs, there are teachers, there are churches. They sing worship songs, they talk about Christ, they opened Bibles, they preach from biblical texts. But mixed into their truth is a lot of destructive heresies that are hard to detect. And you and I must be warned by people who know



the truth, who've studied the truth. You need to be warned as you open up the Bible and see passages like this that command us to beware of certain groups. It's very subtle, it's almost imperceptible. That's why warnings are needed.

I looked up this afternoon on the Internet the fake Apple stores in China. This is fascinating to me. You should go to YouTube and look at these videos of these tours of the fake Apple stores. Now in some places in China there are legitimate Apple stores and you've all been to the Apple store, I assume, and you know what they look like. Well, there's plenty of phony Apple stores in China and go watch these guys with their cameras walk into these stores and it looks exactly like a real Apple store, and here's one reason you know, because there are, in some towns, five Apple stores within like two or three blocks in some downtown Chinese city. Now, we're in a pretty nice area and, you know, I know it's pretty close to look at Mission Viejo and Irvine, and there are our two closest Apple stores, but still I mean Apple's not putting five Apple stores in two or three blocks in a downtown area.

And they walk into these and they look and sure enough there they are with their blue shirts and their Apple logos, they got the Genius Bar and they've got the iPads out, and as they look closer at everything it's full of knockoffs. It's fake. It's phony. And people, it's hard to tell when you walk in because it looks like the real thing but it's not. If you look on a few of these videos it's interesting to watch some of as they look closer and closer at things and one of the videos shows that as they tour the fake Apple store, on the screen of one of the computers, there's the Windows operating system. It took a while to get to that place, but you know if you got Windows on a machine at an Apple store, this is probably not a legitimate Apple store. There are a lot of folks who see the Apple logo, the windows, the glass, those light-colored wooden tables, they see iPads on displays, they see the Apple computer, and they think, "Oh, this is for sure legit."

You understand you go through a directory of churches across the United States of America and people will look at their websites and look at Jesus and look at Bible and look at God and look at Holy Spirit and look at worship, look at evangelism and look at all these words, and they just give it a glance and they say, "Oh, surely this is a place that's absolutely what it should be. It's good."

And you need to know that a lot of those, Jesus would say to you, just as you said to the first century disciples in the hearing of all the people, he wasn't secretly telling people, he was shouting this to the people, you need to beware of certain groups who wear the label, Christian. I'm not just talking about the Mormons and the JW's and the Christian Scientist, you understand. I'm talking about people who bear the evangelical name. The Bible says that the antidote to this, the thing that will keep you anchored, is the Word of God.

I know it's a passage that's directed to a pastor and I said such on the back of your worksheet, as you go through your small groups this week and you discuss this, in Second Timothy Chapter 4 Paul tells this young pastor, Timothy, at Ephesus, you need to preach the Word and "you need to preach it in season and out of season," because here's the problem. There will be a lot of times, and they're coming and you're living in it now, where people will not tolerate the truth. They don't want it. "They will not endure sound teaching," to use the words of Second Timothy Chapter 4 verse 3, "but having itching ears," they want to hear a particular story, they want to hear a particular bend on it, they want to take certain theological things and say, "Well, we like this part, but not that part," and "they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own," here's the key word, this will come back to us throughout the





morning, "their own passions." "This is what feels right to me." Passions are not, you know, don't picture some carousing party with some orgy and some horrible, you know, situation that's so carnal and worldly. No passions just means, "This is what I want, this is what feels good." And do we not live in a day like that?

"I like the Bible, I like Christ, I like Jesus, I like grace, I like worship, I like all that. But, you know, I don't really like all this restrictive stuff about sex and who you can have sex with and if two people love each other can't they...? I mean, come on, why do we have to be so harsh on that. I know the Bible says that, it probably does, for those who have read it, they've seen it, but I just don't know that we really want that part of it. So can't we have Christ and Jesus without all the harsh, really demanding sexual rules and can't we...? That just doesn't feel right to us. So to suit our own passions, can't we have an Apple store that has at least a few machines with Windows on it? Can't we have a Christianity that has that sense of God and Christ and worship and cross and all the rest, but let's not really talk about homosexuality as sin, that wouldn't... I don't want to do that. That doesn't feel right."

And Paul said here's the antidote, "Timothy, preach the word." As Paul testified, "I preach the whole council of God." This is not cafeteria Christianity where I'm picking up things as they go down the line at the cafeteria. "I like this, I don't like that. I don't like those gender distinctions and the Bible's always talking about them, male and female and roles and I don't like that. Can't we all just, kind of, first of all, at least within the Church of Jesus Christ, let's have a more egalitarian view of all this, I don't like all the restrictions on the genders and then today, of course, I don't want any distinctions here between genders. Can't we just go along with the world that's going to applaud anybody who blurs these lines and really castigate anyone who keeps these old archaic biblical distinctions? That doesn't feel right to us. We can theologize this away, I mean can't we? I mean we can ignore some things or we can invalidate some things just by saying it doesn't fit charity and love and isn't that what is supposed to trump it all, 'the greatest of these is love.' So let's just use our definition of love and if we have our definition of love, we can look past all these things because they don't feel good to us."

Go back in the church 30 or 40 years when the church got real comfortable with divorce. "Well, you know, it's, come on, I'm just not happy in this and it's OK and can't we just take all that hard-line stuff and the restrictions about divorce in the Bible and it's only got a couple of real clear exceptions and, but I don't meet those. But can't we just push that out and can't we just say it's not compassionate, it's not loving, doesn't take into account real life situations, and so can't we just move that over." Well sure you can. And you can have churches with teachers who will teach you all of that's fine. Because "people will gather for themselves teachers to suit their own passions." Sanctity of Life, demands of Scripture, church attendance, Bible reading, whatever it is, evangelism. When it comes down to it, anything I don't like in the Bible I can claim, and here's the ultimate trump card that is all over evangelicalism and evangelical churches and denominations and Christian schools and Christian seminaries, that is "You're just taking the Bible too literally. That's your problem."

You've got a choice to make. You can say we don't need to beware of anyone, really. Let's just all get along. Or you can take Jesus' words seriously. When he sits you down in the cockpit of your Christian life and he says, "Be careful of this." "Don't follow this example." I will show you that all that we're about to look at here in verses 46 and 47 really come down to the subtle distinction between you fitting Christianity to your, to use the biblical words, your sensual desires, which is really not about some crazy sex party that takes place down the street, this is about you simply tailoring Christianity to fit

what feels right to you.

Sadly, this kind of defection comes from within the ranks of Christianity. This is not like the external pressures of secularism touches the church or touches the Christian denominations or the Christian schools. This grows up from within. Acts Chapter 20, the Apostle Paul told the church at Ephesus where Timothy would eventually be the pastor there, he says, "I know after my departure there will be fierce wolves who will come in among you, not sparing the flock." But the problem is, like Jesus taught, they won't be dressed in wolves' jerseys, they'll be dressed in sheep's jerseys, and they will speak, here it is, not contrary things, "they'll speak twisted things," verse 30. They'll twist the scripture.

Verse 31, "Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years," he was there in Ephesus, for three years, "I did not cease night and day to admonish every one of you with tears." I warned you about this, I cried over the enemies of the truth who will rise up from within the ranks. And that is our concern. The pastors of this church, the professors at Christian schools, the leaders of Christian denominations, the program directors and the programs on Christian radio, if you're not vigilant, you're not following Jesus Christ who told you to beware of certain people wearing the Christ Jersey.

Scripture is our anchor. To avoid the drift, go back to our text, it's printed there on your worksheet, versus 46 and 47. "In the hearing of all the people he said to the disciples, "beware of the scribes." What's the problem with the scribes? Well, "they walk around in long robes." Isn't that better than short robes? I mean, what's the problem with long robes? I don't understand. Well again, you could go to the parallel passage in Matthew 23 and it might help you to understand what's being talked about here. Here's the clarification that gives us the full picture. Matthew 23 verse 5. It says, "They make their fringes long," their fringes long. Okay, let's just walk through this list. The first four things, they've got "long robes." What does that mean? "They make their fringes long." What is that about? Jot this down now. Numbers Chapter 15 verses 37 through 39. Let me blow your mind right now. Are you're ready? Jesus wore robes with fringes on it.

The fringe is spoken of here, tassels on the edge of his robe. I know that. Why? Because it's commanded of the Lord. "Speak to the people in the hearing of Israel. Make them wear tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations to put a cord of blue on the tassel in each corner. And it shall be a tassel for them to look at to remember all the commands of the Lord to do them and to follow the commandments and not follow after their own heart or their own eyes." So, the sensuality, if you will, to go back to that biblical word, their sensual desires, the things that they want, they need to remember the commands of God. Well here were the leaders doing exactly what the Bible says and that is putting tassels on the corner of their robes. Jesus had tassels on the corners of his robe because he was obedient to the Mosaic law, until the curtain ripped, that Old Covenant Law was in place and he kept every single ceremony of the Old Testament. He did exactly what any good Jewish person did, he kept all the ceremonial law. And as he did, he wore tassels on his garments.

Remember that scene when the woman with the hemorrhage reached out and touched him? It says in the English Standard Version, she touched his fringe of his garment. That's his tassels, she grabbed the corners of the tassels of his robe. So here's Jesus standing here teaching with tassels on the corner of his robe, and he says, "Beware of the scribes." He didn't say, because they have tassels on the edge of their robes, because they make their tassels, with the fringes of their robe, they make them long. "Well, you're kind of getting nitpicky now aren't you?" I guess what you're trying to see in this passage is that



this is a very subtle distinction. "Yeah, Jesus, how long were the tassels on his...?" I don't know. It doesn't tell us how long it's supposed to be. Were they this long, were they this long, were they this long? I don't know. He had the blue cord in the tassels on the corner of his robe, but apparently, these guys made their tassels long. "Come on, Jesus. Really?" That one you may not be able to identify with because you're not required in the New Covenant to have the ceremonial law. You don't have any of the ceremonial tassels on your robe.

But the next one, I think all of us can identify with, "They love greetings in the marketplace." Do you love greetings in the marketplace? Would you rather, when I see you at Costco, I turn away and don't say anything to you? Or would you like me to go, "Hey, how you doing? Good to see you. So great to see you." Walk up, shake your hand, give you a hug. "Great to see you." Don't you like that? You like greetings when you're out and about at the marketplace. I mean, you don't want people to turn their head away from you. "Jesus, come on. Who doesn't like greetings? Jesus, you don't like greetings in the marketplace?" What are you trying to say? I'm trying to say this is a very subtle concern here. Notice the words, "They LIKE to walk around in long robes. They LOVE greetings in the marketplace."

Well, they have robes, you're supposed to wear tassels, theirs just happen to be a little bit longer. Why is that? Because we're getting to it. Because they love greetings. "I like greetings in the marketplace." Keep reading. You have to supply the verb again. "They love the best seats in the synagogue." I don't know, when you go to the performing arts center, do you like the bad seats? Would you like to have a good seat? What if they said, "Oh sir, we'd like you to sit in the best seat." Would you go, "No, I hate that, I hate the best seat." No, you want the best seat. You want the best seat in the synagogue. And not to mention, these are the scribes, they're the teachers. Would you want to have a guest speaker come and have him sit in the worst seat? No, you want him in a good seat so he has access to stand up and open the scrolls and teach. You want the leader, the teacher, to have a good seat. Let's give him the best seat, that's appropriate. You understand that this is an outgrowth of something that's not only a normal command of the Old Testament, it is a required command of the New Testament. Jot this down, First Thessalonians Chapter 5 says this about your responsibility to your leaders, verses 12 and 13. "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work."

I hope you do that to people who teach you. I not only hope it because I might be the recipient of that, I hope that for the sake of your sanctification because it is required of you. If you have, I don't know, Al Mohler, if you didn't give him honor, you're not a very good Christian. The Bible says that is your requirement. Give him the best seat, take care of him, honor him, greet him warmly in the marketplace if you see him.

How about this, "the places of honor at feasts," they love that. Well, I'd hope that you'd give someone in an important position of leadership in your life a place of honor. You invite me over to your dinner, you've got a lot of people coming over, I would hope that you wouldn't sit me in the corner on a folding chair. You'd say, "Pastor Mike is here. Hey, come..." I don't know, maybe you'll even give up your recliner for me in your living room. Would that be sin? No, that would not be sin. Would it be sin for me to take that seat? "Oh thanks, I get a padded seat when I sit at your dinner table. That's great. You didn't sit me on the piano bench or whatever. That's very nice. Thank you." Is that sin? No, it's not sin. That's appropriate. The sin is not any of these things, tassels on their robes, greetings in the marketplace, best seat for the teachers before they step up and teach in the auditorium, places of honor





at feasts. They are supposed to be honorable aren't they? There are leaders of Israel, they're teachers of the Law, they're educated and servants of the people. Right?

That is supposed to be, but the real problem is very subtle. They like it and they love it. They like to have that display so that you'll notice the corners of their robes. They love the fact that you greet them. They love the fact that they have that seat. They love the fact that they're honored in these feasts. They love it.

And it leads to the next two, six things described here in verse 47. Now we get to see, in a very clear way, what you may not be able to see if you were really honest and thinking about the first four, in verse 46. Now you've got this word, "They devour widows' houses." Now you've gotten a little pugnacious here, devour widows' houses, devour. So there's a picture of someone eating away at someone's house. Whose house? A widow's house. Widows? Yeah, they are the most vulnerable people, particularly in an agrarian, ancient society, even in a city setting of Jerusalem. That woman is in a state of vulnerability. Her husband is dead, and now what's going to happen to her? Well, they would go, as often, and even today, happens, to the religious leaders and say, "Would you be someone to administrate and help be the executor for the estate of my husband, help solve the legal issues. My husband was in the middle of these contracts, so I need someone to represent me before the lawyers or whatever." And they would come to the leaders, just like I, as a pastor, have been asked to be the executor in widow's estates. It's something that just happens. "Would you help me?" And, of course, they step up and help.

But when they help, now we're getting down to the real problem with liking and loving all of this honor in this position. They use that and the love for that goes beyond just saying, "Well that's appropriate. I'm really glad that you're functioning according to the biblical principles." Now it's about how can I parlay that position of leadership for some kind of advantage in my life. And what's the obvious implied thing here? Well apparently they're making some kind of financial gain out of these women and they're devouring part of the estate that should be enjoyed by this vulnerable widow now and they're taking it for themselves to add to their own treasuries, in their own pockets, their wallets getting fat because they're the executors of the estates of these widows. That's not good. They take advantage of them.

"And for a pretense they make long prayers." Even that, I suppose, if you put in a lot of hours to help a widow, I don't know, if she wanted to offer you money. I think if that happened 15 times in a row, the 16th widow who asked you for help, you may expect it, you may even say, well here's my fee. And when it comes to prayers, if you're asked to pray, as these scribes were over and over again, I guess the subtlety of this, even though it's diagnosed very sternly that it's a pretense, it's fake, it's phony, would be that you're praying really more for the people who hear you than your prayers being directed to God.

And anybody who prays in public, and you're looking at a guy who prays in public a lot, I've prayed at city council meetings, I've prayed on the stage of Angel Stadium, I've prayed in front of big crowds, I've prayed on TV, I've prayed on the radio, I've pray in front of you on this platform. I mean, really what it comes down to is, something you can't see, how much of what he's praying, as he prays and leads us in prayer, is a pretense, it's not real, it's not genuine, he's not really talking to God. It's about really making sure that this lengthy prayer gives you some insight about me and I'm trying to get you, like I am with my robe and as I am in kind of enjoying the greetings and the honored seats in places at



the feast and even the payment for my services, I'm taking all of that because really, it's all about, I'm finally getting down to it now, to me.

Now let's get back to that word, to my sensual desires. What is that? Sex? I'm not talking about that. We're talking about "it feels good, it feels right, I like it, there's an advantage here, I like the paycheck, I like the greetings, I like the honor, I even like the fact that you think I'm godly." It's something so subtle in the interior of our lives. Now why did Jesus say beware of the scribes? Well because he didn't want you to become like them. So let's make it really personal here.

Number two on your outline, you need to make sure you won't slide or drift into this. Number two on your outline, you need to "Avoid the Drift Into," let's just put the word there, "Selfish Religion." Now for us it's Christianity. Right? In the Old Testament, here were Jews who were doing their religious service and ultimately serving themselves, indulging in the good feelings of what they were doing that ultimately was more about themselves than about God. I just wonder how much of your Christianity can easily drift into, "I like it for me. It feels right for me. I want to parlay this so that I get the advantage." And so that you sit back and say, it's really worth it being a Christian, because I see this, this and this as part of what makes it all worth it and it really comes down to me.

I call it the drift because the Bible's very clear that everyone who gets exposed to the truth, as I said in the first point, will be tempted, and I would say assaulted, to morph this thing called Christianity into something that's more about you than it is about God. Look at the history of Israel. I mean here they were warned at Mount Sinai, it's all about God, it's about you fearing God, reverencing God, serving God. You are the servant, he is the master. You're the citizen, he's the King. This is how it works. And to watch them slide into complacency and he warned them about that in Deuteronomy. You're going to get fat and you're going to get into a place of comfort. And my fear is you will lose all of that edge and it'll all become about you and you won't honor God anymore. Even after the Babylonian captivity when you think they would have learned their lesson.

Here you have an Malachi Chapter 1, the prophet saying, "Now really you are just checking boxes in your spiritual life." And when it comes down to it, this is more about you than it is about him. If God demands an unblemished sheep from your flock, you instead give him a diseased or a blind animal that you couldn't sell in the marketplace anyway. You can check the box, everyone thinks you're godly, but when it comes down to it, you just don't want Christianity to be some kind of imposition on you.

And I just want to ask you this question. When it comes down to it, how many things in your Christian life have you really, like the cafeteria Christianity, said, "I'll take that because that feels right. And really when it comes to that, I won't always be committed to that because it's too costly. I don't like what it makes me feel. I don't like what I have to sacrifice for it." I mean, just think of simple things, "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together." Let me get as basic as you can get in the Christian life. We are not supposed to forsake the assembling. "What does that mean? I can't miss church?" I'm not saying that but it's a priority. And these little things going on with your kid's programs or your kid's athletics or your retreats or your vacations or your trips, you got to look at all of that and say, "Now wait a minute here, God has given me a clear admonition. 'All the more as we see the day approaching.' How much of that do I pick and choose based on what it feels like to me?"

I mean you've got to look at this in a very basic way, whether it's evangelism, whether it's prayer,



whether it's Bible study, whether it's you just standing up for the truth of Christ, the whole council of God, and not picking and choosing. You've got to ask yourself, am I drifting into a selfish kind of Christianity, because the drift is going to happen. I use the word drift because I pick it up from Hebrews Chapter 2 verse 1, that says, "We ought to pay very close attention to what we've heard." I told you, the anchor that keeps us where we need to be is the Word of God. The people in Hebrews Chapter 2 had heard it and he said, "You better pay very close attention to what you've heard" because, here's how it's written, "lest," it says in Hebrew Chapter 2 verse 1, "lest you drift away from it." That's the fear, you drift from it. Now if you're go into placid waters, you're not going to drift anywhere. You go swimming in a river, you're going to drift. And that's what we've got. We've got everything pushing towards selfishness, everything pushing toward making it comfortable and convenient for you. Christianity is going to anchor you to the truth of God, if you continue to fear him and if you're tenacious about fidelity to the Word. Those are the two things that, if you really want to diagnose the problem, it's all about the lack of the fear of God, and it's the lack of tenacity for the fidelity to Scripture.

And when you lose those two things, you've got nothing to moor you anymore to biblical Christianity and you become a scribe. You become, "Well, how can I still keep the shell of Christianity here," and it happens slowly, "and serve myself to where it feels right to me."

A classic example of this is this line, this paragraph from the freshman orientation handbook of university students. Let me read a little bit for you from it. "Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well that the chief end of life and study is to know God and Jesus Christ who his eternal life." Does that sound good? "The student, therefore, shall lay Christ as the foundation for all sound knowledge and learning." That's good to tell a freshman going into a university, isn't it? "And seeing that the Lord alone gives wisdom, let every student give himself to private prayer and to seek wisdom from God. Every student shall discipline themselves, unrelated to class time, to a time of personal reading of Scripture at least twice a day." Well, that's good. You want to send your kid to that college.

Guess what college that is. It must be a fundamentalist college somewhere in the south. Right? No, that's Harvard University. Not today, Harvard University in 1636. That's what they handed the freshman. Listen to those words. "Seeing that the Lord alone gives wisdom, let every student give himself to private prayer and seek wisdom from God. Every student shall discipline himself to a personal time of reading Scripture at least twice a day."

Harvard doesn't care much anymore if you're reading Scripture twice a day. Matter of fact, they'd prefer that you don't read Scripture twice a day, when you're walking to your gender studies class or your lesbian appreciation class or the seminar that speaks about the ills of Christianity in western society. The freedom of expression classes.

If you know a little Latin and you walk around the campus of Harvard University you'll read the Latin inscriptions and you'll translate them. When it comes to the motto of the campus etched on their walls. "Truth." Here's the translation, "Truth: for Christ in the church." I remember walking into Chapman University up here and seeing it in Greek. Same thing, "For Christ and the church." I mean, this is how these universities were often founded. Brown, Cornell, Yale University. I mean, this is how they started. They were committed to the truth, to the Word of God.



You walk into Emerson Hall in Harvard before you go in to hear all this anti-Christian screed, it says over the top, it will quote the Psalms, right out of the Psalms, about the humility of man and the exhalation of God. Go translate them, go look, some are in English. What happened? Hebrews Chapter 2 verse 1 happened. They didn't pay close attention to what they heard, they drifted from it, and so will every Christian school, so will every Christian church, so will every denomination, so will every Christian bookstore. They will all drift, if they don't pay careful attention to what has been preached, what has been taught, to what Jesus said. Beware of organizations that don't warn you. You ought to be warned not to drift into the selfish religion that the scribes were clearly personifying in Jesus' day.

Second Peter Chapter 2 verse 1 that I quoted for you, "But false prophets arose among the people just as there will be false teachers among you, they will secretly creep in and they will bring in their destructive heresies." Here's our word again, verse 2, "Many will follow their sensuality." What does that mean? Sex parties? No. Whatever feels right, it may get to that, but it starts with, that feels better to not have that prohibition, it feels better to allow people to do that, it feels better to not be so legalistic about that, it feels better if we can just say, "love trumps that," that verse, that feels better.

"But because of them the way of truth is maligned, it's blasphemed and in their greed," just like the scribes, that's a self-serving determination to get something for myself out of it, "they exploit you with false words." Now here's the end of that warning, "Their condemnation from long ago." That means the paradigm of the false prophets being punished by God, "is not idle," it is going to happen to them, "and their destruction is not asleep."

Why would the Holy Spirit have Peter write those words? Because these are the words of God, the words of Christ. Look how our passage ends, with a warning, a fearful warning. You know these people that I don't want you to become like, I don't want you to imbibe on their philosophy, they will receive the greater condemnation. For what? For walking around with tassels that are longer than yours, for liking those robes, for loving greetings, for loving seats in synagogues that are good, for having places of honor at banquets? Really?

Yeah, because it's all about that self-serving parlance of Christianity for their own pleasure, their own means. It's not obvious at first. It may be at Harvard University today, but when it started to slip, just like every other organization tends to, it wasn't obvious at all. It was almost imperceptible. What ought to keep us vigilant? The threat of greater condemnation.

Number three on your outline, we ought to "Fear the Consequences of Compromise." Every week, I hope, from the Word of God, as we preach the Word in season and out of season, I hope from this platform, you recognize there are consequences for compromise. Maybe the reason you don't like this church or you're listening on the radio and you stop going to this church is because you don't like hearing that. Again, you understand that sequential teaching of text of Scripture keeps us from picking and choosing what we preach on. There are a lot of passages like this, I don't wake up and go, "Oh, this is great. Look what I get to preach on this week." I'd like to skip it. But I figured you'd notice if I skipped it, so I have to preach it because we're going sequence through the Scripture, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. It's why we plant churches that do the same, so we can get the whole council of God out to the people of God. But as you hear that warning of compromise you need to understand God would have us fear the consequences. Judgment is what I'm talking about, another passé biblical



doctrine. No one wants to talk about warnings. No one wants to talk about judgment.

Here's the intro to a bestselling "Christian" book from one of the most influential Christian authors in our country. He was named by the secular Time magazine as one of the 100 Most Influential People, not just preachers, people in the country. He writes, "I've written this book for all those everywhere who have heard some version of the Jesus story that caused their pulse rate to rise, their stomach to churn and their hearts to utter those resolute words, 'I would never want to be a part of that.'" What in the Bible or the Jesus story, as you call it, makes your pulse rate rise, we wouldn't want you to read anything that makes your pulse rate rise or your stomach to churn. We don't want to make your tummy hurt, or your heart to utter words..." Well, isn't that interesting, even that subtle switch, because you know your heart doesn't utter words.

That's certainly what we have in our day is people responding, not from their minds, but from their apparent seat of their emotions. They're feeling their way through the Christian life, which I warn you of all the time, instead of thinking their way through the Christian life. Jesus gave us propositions to think clearly about truth and instead we're feeling our way through what we think is truth. The author says, "If you've had that before and you've uttered in your heart those resolute words, 'I don't want to be a part of that.' Hey, you're not alone there are millions of us," he says. "This love..." which again trumps everything as long as we define love the way we want. "This love compels us to question some of the dominant stories that are being told as the Jesus story." All that Christianity stuff is not really true. "A staggering number of people have been taught that a few select Christians will spend eternity forever in a peaceful, joyous place called Heaven and the rest of humanity is going to spend forever in torment and punishment in Hell with no chance of anything better. Well this clearly communicates to many that this is the central belief of the Christian faith and to reject it is, in essence, to reject Jesus. Well this misguided and toxic," there's a word about my churning gut. It's all about my feelings. "And ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus' message of love and peace and forgiveness and joy that our world desperately needs to hear."

Let me edit the book as a publishing editor. It's not what they NEED to hear, it's what they WANT to hear. I understand you will be on Time magazine's cover eventually if you keep proffering this stuff in the name of Christ, because that's what they want. And, of course, this is Rob Bell's book "Love Wins" and really when it comes down to it as we've said repeatedly, it's really that love WARNS because there is judgment and all that he tries to talk his way around in this book.

Oh, it gets him on the stage with Oprah Winfrey, and I haven't gotten that call yet, because when it comes down to it, they don't want to hear about the warnings of sin, particularly when it comes so close to home, when it's about selfishness and things that make me feel right, and not rejecting the things that make me feel wrong about all this, make my stomach churn and my pulse rate rise.

Judgment is fearful enough if we just use that word and went on. But this passage that we're studying this morning says "greater condemnation." Why will it be greater for the people who wear the Jesus Jersey. Well, here's why, three quick reasons. Because errant leaders in view in this passage are religious leaders. They're naming the name of God, and in our case they're naming the name of Christ, they call themselves Christians. It's one thing for you to spend your life giving bad information about car repair. It's one thing for you to go around spewing a lot of false stuff about computers. It's way worse for you misdirecting people about God. That's called blasphemy in the Bible. Something that





should be sacred and important and, instead, we bring it down and modify it and put everything down here on the lower shelf and make sure it's palatable for everyone. That's blasphemy. Taking something sacred and making it mundane. In the Bible nothing is worse than blasphemy.

Secondly, because these errant leaders always affect more than themselves. Why will they have greater condemnation? Because they're leaders. "Praise God I'm not a leader," you say. You know your life, even if you don't hold any positions of leadership in the church, no one sees you as a teacher, you're not even in our discipleship program discipling anybody, I mean you rarely talk to anybody about Christ, even in me describing you that way, if that happens to be you, because you don't live in a hermetically sealed bubble, people hear you, they watch you and someone knows you're a Christian. They watch what you do, how you view the Scripture, even as I talked about something as basic as church attendance and they look at you and how you view that, how you prioritize that, how you value that, and they say, "OK, that's how Christians are supposed to think about this." You are a leader. Your decisions and your values and whether or not you're willing to talk about the truth, it affects people. You will have some level on Judgment Day of connection with people who look at you and say, he influenced me. Fear the consequences of compromise, particularly when it comes to spiritual things, because when we say the wrong things about spiritual things, it's a kind of offensive blasphemy that God reserves the harshest words for. When it comes to our lives, we are leaders.

And it has a compounding effect. The parallel passages in Matthew Chapter 23 verse 15 it says. "when you make a proselyte," speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, "you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourself." What's that? Let's just look at that in generations. Your view of Scripture, you don't think your kids are going to take that one step further in moving toward what fits their feelings? Your view of the church, they're going to take that one step further to accommodate that and tailor that to their feelings. We've got to be two things that I've diagnosed it this way and, again I have taken time to prove this to you, is the fear of God and a tenacious fidelity to Scripture. If we lose those two things, we'll continue to compromise.

Greater condemnation, thirdly, because you can't be in this state without willfully rejecting the truth. In other words, here were the scribes who knew better. They weren't without knowledge. There are people who will be, on Judgment Day, less accountable for their sin than people who have sat in this church for years listening to the Word of God taught. Because if you don't apply the Word of God, you cannot claim you didn't know it. Speaking of the false teachers, the Holy Spirit says through Peter in Second Peter Chapter 2 verse 21, "it would be better for people who have not known the way of truth than to know it and turn their back on it."

The greater condemnation comes to the scribes because no one knew the Scripture better than the scribes, but they had chosen to approach their religion as a cafeteria religion just like many cafeteria Christians who pick and choose what they want as long as it makes me feel good, it fits my desires and it advantages me in some way.

The judgment, I can parallel this Old Covenant - New Covenant, it's the same. You've got people who should be God's prized possession. You've got people who should be in sync with God and God says, if you won't do it, I'll move on. Malachi Chapter 1, after the Babylonian captivity, you know what, "My name is going to be revered from the rising of the sun to the setting." And if you're not going to do it, shut the gates, I'll get other people to burn incense and in a revered, holy, sanctified way, and in Acts,



didn't that come true? Paul reasons in the synagogue from the Scriptures. He goes back to the Scriptures and they reject him and he says, fine. He kicks the dust off of his feet and, as the quarterback of this new season in the Book of Acts, he goes to the Gentiles. Now God's got a plan. He's going to return to it all, and Paul taught that clearly through the inspiration of the Spirit in Romans Chapters 9, 10 and 11. But for now, times of the Gentiles.

A New Testament parallel? Well, Jesus says to his church in Laodicea in Revelation Chapter 3, because they don't fear me, they don't highly revere my Word, I'm going to be the center of what they say they're about, but I'm going to stand outside of my own church and I'm going to be there knocking. There's the grace of Christ. I'd like to be a part of that church, but until you see that you're lukewarm, tailored faith is not biblically grounded, it's not driven by the fear of God or a tenacious fidelity to Scripture, I'm going to stand outside.

If I said to you, your family right now, because of your compromise, Christ is not even in your family. I mean that should frighten you. If I said Christ isn't even in this church, all this programming, all this activity, Christ is not even here. He's standing outside of the door and knocking. That's the picture Jesus paints of Laodicea. About the Christian school you send your sons and your daughters off to, if I said, Christ isn't even there, he's on the outside, just kind of knocking, because they've compromised. You'd fear that, I hope.

Speaking of drinking out of the toilet, I saw a comic this week. Family sitting on a couch, they're all drinking out of their milkshakes and their sodas, they got a straw. At the end of the couch is the family dog and he's got a series of straws that he's constructed going down the hall into the toilet. We live in a dog's world. Dogs drink from the toilet, as one comic, that I also stumbled across, and think to themselves, it doesn't get any better than this.

It does. Christ is not wanting to make you unpopular so you can suffer. He's not wanting you to adhere to sexual ethics because he doesn't want you to be having any fun. He doesn't want you to be separate from the world and be faithful to Scripture because he wants you to somehow struggle through life. No, he knows, as it says in James Chapter 4, that he jealously desires what's right. I love the word "Teleos." He wants what's right. He wants it to be the way it's supposed to be and in a sinful world that's going to be in conflict with the world and it's going to be in conflict with your own desires. It's going to have a pathway to what is real genuine joy and peace, that is going to wage war against your soul, the desires of your flesh. And while the world is asking you to drink from the toilet, if you will, as crude as that is this morning, Christ says you've got something so much better that's waiting for you. Here's how it's put. He says, "You're cheating on me because you want a worldly religion, you are adulteresses, but if you would just recognize that if you drew nearer to me, if you just came back here, I'd draw near to you. But you'd have to confess your sin, purify your hand, purify your minds." Actually, the things that made you laugh because of your compromise in the world, let that turn into mourning and sorrow and crying.

And I love the end of that great passage in James 4, if you just "humble yourself before the Lord, he will exalt you," not to the selfish pandering, your desires to have the best seat of honor at feasts or the best seats in synagogues, or greetings or people saying, "man your religious, look at your prayers and your robes." But he'll exalt you the right way. Guard yourself against the usurpers of the glory of Christ. He's not going to share his glory with us. Let's be warned and never drift into selfish religion.



Let's pray. God, help us, please, in a day of books and programs and churches and denominations and schools that really just want to make everything palatable according to a fleshly standard of acceptance and propriety. God we're not here for that. We're here to live by your standards. In our minds, we know it, in our hearts, in terms of our flesh at least, our desires, it fights against that. So every time we open up the Word and particularly when we open it up here corporately at church, we want to be reminded of what we ought to resolve to be, what we ought to resolve to believe, what we ought to be convictional about. Help us to be convictional about your Word, even if everyone in the world mocks us for it. Give us that kind of, as I put it, fear of God and tenacity to be faithful to the Scripture.

One day those books will be open and we'll be evaluated about whether or not we were faithful to it. Of course we're going to stumble and fall. Of course they'll be compromise. But God, let it be the kind of compromise that's not willful, as the Bible says, not the high-handed kind of I'm going to do this, because I just don't want to suffer. Let us realize the joy of what it is. Even Paul in the dungeon in Philippi, with a back that had been filleted by the cat-of-nine-tails being able to say that God is great, singing hymns with Silas. External, a lot of suffering. Internal, a lot of joy. God, give us that kind of joy and peace knowing we're walking with you, even if the whole world stands against us. May you multiply this tribe, for those who affirm and their hearts are in sync with what's been preached this morning, I pray you multiply this tribe here at Compass Bible Church. Make it strong. Let it stand as a beacon of light. May it be as our theme verse says, may we shine forth the truth of your light that people be drawn to your Holy Hill that would know you, truly know you, not just a compromise religion that panders to our selfishness. Keep us on guard as we walk into the world now throughout this week.

In Jesus name. Amen.