***Matthew 23:27-28 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. 28Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.***

We’re with Jesus this morning, in the last week before He’s crucified. We know that the Triumphal entry has happened, Passover is approaching, and the religious authorities are searching for any opportunity to arrest Him. He’s a threat to their power and position. He brings Hope to the hopeless, healing to the sick, and life to the Spiritually dead. In John 10:10, Jesus reminds us that He came that we may have life and have it more abundantly.

Lest we think that Jesus and the Pharisees are alone in an alley, recall that the crowds cried out Hosanna to Him just a day or so earlier, people are talking about Him, seeking Him. The historian Josephus wrote that Jerusalem swelled to two million people during Passover. Some sources say lower. Regardless, the streets were crowded and, rest assured, people were there to witness these woes spoken by Jesus.

These woe statements were not only a warning of danger, but an expression of deep grief. Jesus is saddened to see the hardness of heart. He loved the Jewish people, longed to gather them as a hen gathers her brood, beneath a protective wing. The Pharisees and the scribes were stumbling blocks to the Gospel. Anything that is a stumbling block to the Gospel is a stumbling block to salvation.

Verse 27 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.* Hypocrites! The Greek word has the idea of an actor assuming a character. The Pharisees and the scribes were pretending, reveling in the wow-factor that the crowd felt. They were treated with high respect, honored, like celebrities.

During the preparation for Passover, tomb were whitewashed. Numbers 19:13 *Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the Lord. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him.* The months leading up to Passover are very rainy. The whitewash is made of lime and water and rain washes this off. Many were employed to go about and whitewash the tombs to avoid accidental uncleanness. Bright white stones, well-defined lines around burial areas allow travelers to stay wide of anything that may defile them and, if the Temple official comes in contact with this person, the official is unclean as well, for seven days, and must follow a ritual to be declared clean again. This statement would’ve greatly angered the religious elite. Jesus is revealing the condition of their heart. Outwardly, they look beautiful, their faith appears to be flourishing, while inside they are spiritually dead, literally full means swelled outward with deadness. They keep the outward appearances, while deadness and impurity lives within.

Many live like that today. They look and sound good on the outside, but they know evil lives within. They have a closet, cabinet, crevice, or crack that they hide from the light of the Spirit. The Pharisees and scribes would’ve been outraged that Jesus calls out their evil! Likewise, people are outraged today, when they hear the Truth, that only Jesus can cleanse and save, there is no other way. It’s not a buffet – it’s One Way.

Verse 28 *Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.* You appear beautiful and growing on the outside, righteous. Inside, you are full (again swelled to the point of bursting) with hypocrisy and lawlessness, meaning deceit and wickedness. They decorated the tombs of the prophets, made large donations in the temple, did good deeds for all to see, and could quote scripture like no one’s business. But, beneath the surface, back in the corners where no eyes could see, they thought they were hiding what Jesus clearly sees.

And so it is today, not with some of us, but all of us. Romans 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* We must be diligent as David – Psalm 139:23-24 *Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.* Sin has a way of slithering in. It can be so slow, encouraged by people around us, approved by society, and legal by all the laws of the land. We are saved, but sin separates us from living in relationship with God. The Pharisees claimed to love God, but they hated His Son, Emmanuel God with us. Evil thoughts, lustful desires, withering gossip, haughty pride. Our thoughts reveal the corners where the Spirit’s light has not yet reached – wicked ways we have not yet acknowledged before God. We all have work to do.

This week, check the spiritual temperature – is it hot or lukewarm? Jesus knows whether the beauty is coming from the inside or if it was painted on, only to be washed away in the next beating rainstorm. He wants us to know. Let’s seek His guidance with our hearts, open our thoughts to His examination, and allow the Light of the Holy Spirit to flood our souls.