

Matthew 23:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

Analysis

Ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous (οἰκοδομεῖτε τοὺς τάφους τῶν προφητῶν καὶ κοσμεῖτε τὰ μνημεῖα τῶν δικαίων)—kosmeite means "to adorn, decorate, beautify." The Pharisees constructed elaborate monuments honoring martyred prophets—likely including Isaiah (tradition says sawn in two, Hebrews 11:37), Jeremiah (stoned in Egypt, tradition), Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24:20-22). This appeared pious: honoring God's messengers their ancestors killed.

But Jesus exposes the irony: they honor dead prophets while preparing to kill the Prophet standing before them. They've turned martyrdom memorials into monuments to their own imagined righteousness—"We would never do what our ancestors did." This self-congratulation while plotting Jesus's murder reveals that honoring past prophets can camouflage rejection of present ones.

Historical Context

Second Temple period Jews built elaborate tomb monuments, especially for prophets and righteous figures. Absalom's Pillar and the Tomb of Zechariah in Kidron Valley date to this era. These monuments demonstrated supposed reverence for God's messengers. But Jesus spoke this days before the Sanhedrin (composed largely of Pharisees and Sadducees) would illegally try Him, suborn

false witnesses, and demand Roman crucifixion—exactly what their ancestors did to the prophets.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How do we honor past spiritual heroes while rejecting current prophetic voices that challenge our comfort and compromise?
2. What monuments, institutions, or traditions have you built to commemorate past faithfulness while ignoring present calls to repentance?
3. In what ways does celebrating historical Christian courage serve as substitute for present obedience to costly discipleship?

Interlinear Text

Οὐαὶ ὑμῖν γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαῖοι ὑποκριταί ὅτι
Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites ! because
G3759 G5213 G1122 G2532 G5330 G5273 G3754

οἰκοδομεῖτε τοὺς τάφους τῶν προφητῶν καὶ κοσμεῖτε
ye build the tombs of the prophets and garnish
G3618 G3588 G5028 G3588 G4396 G2532 G2885

τὰ μνημεῖα τῶν δικαίων
the sepulchres of the righteous
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