

Day 23, Matthew 23

by David Servant

Jesus denounces the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy and self-serving actions, calling believers to examine themselves and repent.

Scripture: Matthew 23:5-37

Topics: "Hypocrisy", "Humility"

Description

David Servant preaches on the characteristics of the scribes and Pharisees, warning against hypocrisy, love for money, false teachings, and seeking titles and recognition. He emphasizes the importance of humility, sincerity in following God's commandments, and serving others as the highest calling in God's kingdom. The sermon highlights the dangers of seeking praise from people, twisting scripture for personal gain, and neglecting justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Transcript

The scribes and Pharisees were Israel's spiritual leaders, having "seated themselves in the chair of Moses," a special seat in each synagogue from which the Old Testament scrolls were read. That is why Jesus told His audience to do all that the scribes and Pharisees told them to do. He was speaking only of those times when the scribes or Pharisees were publicly reading from the Law and Prophets.

It is good for all of us, but especially leaders, to examine ourselves in the light of Jesus' denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees. Are we like them in any way? If so, we need to repent, because Jesus thrice affirmed in this chapter that unrepentant scribes and Pharisees go to hell (23:13, 15, 33).

What were some of the characteristics of the scribes and Pharisees?

Foremost, they were motivated by a desire for the praise of people. So they made themselves appear very religious in public by broadening their phylacteries, small leather boxes containing scripture texts worn on the forehead and left arm. It would be akin to our carrying a big Bible to church just to make people think we are really studious in Scripture. The Pharisees also lengthened the tassels on their garments for the sake of appearance. God had commanded the people of Israel to make tassels on the corners of their garments as reminders of His commandments (see Num. 15:38-40). So the Pharisees sent a subtle message with their longer tassels: "I'm really serious about keeping God's commandments." The trouble was, they were only serious about appearing to be serious about keeping God's commandments.

The scribes and Pharisees also loved the public respect they received, and their common titles of Teacher, Father, and Leader were the proof. Jesus told His disciples not to call anyone but God their Father, and He also forbade the titles of Teacher or Leader. In that regard, many modern ministers follow the letter of the law, yet require those underneath them always to address them as Pastor, Reverend, Doctor, Bishop, or even Apostle. How is that any different from what the Pharisees did? And those letters that you often see behind their names are just like tail feathers on a peacock. Get ready, title-loving ministers, to ultimately be humbled to the same degree that you've exalted yourself, because Jesus promised it. The highest title in God's kingdom is servant. There is no pyramid. We're all brothers.

I must mention that modern ministers who proclaim a false grace gospel "shut off the kingdom of heaven from men" just as did the scribes and Pharisees.

The Pharisees were lovers of money (see Luke 16:14), thus they used their "ministries" to gain all they could, to the point of praying long prayers for gullible widows in order to dislodge some coins from some widows' purses. Modern Pharisees teach their followers "prosperity principles" to the benefit of their own bank accounts.

The Pharisees were zealous missionaries because they wanted to be known as such. But their disciples became "twice the sons of hell" as they were.

The Pharisees were professional scripture-twisters, and they focused, for their own advantage, on what was of lesser importance in Scripture. Topics such as tithing (23:23), which resulted in more money in their pockets, were more frequently the focus of their sermons than were the "weightier provisions of the law" such as "justice and mercy and faithfulness." (When was the last time one of those was a sermon topic at your church?)

Bible Jesus is not afraid to denounce false spiritual leaders publicly, even calling them derogatory names, while American Jesus "walks in love," keeping quiet, not wanting to offend anyone.

Bible Jesus was not a Calvinist by the way, because He wanted to "gather Jerusalem's children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (23:37). But why didn't He? Was it because the Father had not predestined salvation for those chicks whom the Son wanted to gather (setting Jesus against His Father, incidentally)? No, it was because those chicks were "unwilling." Consequently, the wrath of Bible Jesus would fall upon Jerusalem some forty years later in the form of a Roman army.

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