

# All That Jesus Taught Bible Study - Part 67

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of living out one's faith, not just having correct doctrine, and the danger of doctrinal brainwashing that can lead to false security.*

**Duration:** 23:07

**Scripture:** Psalm 15:4, Matthew 5:37, Matthew 23:15, Matthew 23:23, Luke 14:26-27, Romans 7:21-25

**Topics:** "Hypocrisy", "Spiritual Integrity"

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## Description

This sermon delves into Matthew 23, focusing on Jesus' teachings about the Pharisees. It emphasizes the importance of aligning inner beliefs with outward actions, warning against hypocrisy and the danger of neglecting justice, mercy, and faithfulness. The message stresses the significance of integrity in keeping promises and the weightier matters of the law over minor details. Jesus highlights the need to prioritize cleansing the inner life to reflect purity externally, challenging believers to live authentically and in alignment with God's principles.

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## Transcript

We continue today in our study in the series of all that Jesus taught. And we've been looking through the Gospel of Matthew. We've come today to Matthew 23 and verse 15.

This is a chapter where Jesus is dealing with the Pharisees. He didn't speak to the Pharisees. He spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples about the characteristics of the Pharisees.

And it's a very instructive passage because the Pharisees were people who had a right doctrine. Jesus commended them for what they taught. Everything they taught was right, he said in verse 3. The only thing they didn't live according to what they taught.

And the other thing was their external life was good, verse 25. The outside of their cup was clean, but the inside was dirty. And so where you have correct doctrine and a good external life, you could still be, verse 33, a brood of vipers ready to go to hell.

That's what many evangelical Christians don't understand. You can be evangelical in doctrine, good in external life, and be a thorough Pharisee on your way to hell. It's quite a revealing chapter if you are honest enough to face it.

And the devil won't let you face up to the truth. He'd like to fool you so that you can spend eternity with him. So you've got to be careful that you're not allowed, you don't allow the devil to deceive you.

It's the inner life that matters. The one thing that would have delivered the Pharisees from Phariseeism would be not only if they could preach the right doctrine, but if they practiced it. And secondly, if they not only were concerned about their external life, but their inner life as well.

The very same two points which were their strong points, in those very two points you see also their weak points. And so if they faced up to that, they would be delivered in evangelical Christians whose doctrine is right, would practice what they believed, and if their inner life corresponded to their external life, then they would be freed from Phariseeism. So we come to verse 15 where he says, Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he becomes one you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

So they were missionaries. Look at another good quality apparently in the eyes of men that they had. They were missionaries.

Now whenever you hear of someone going out into the mission field, you have a respect for him. There's an automatic respect for someone who leaves his country, crosses land and sea. It must mean a sacrifice.

That means he gave up their job and inconvenience for the family and so many things to go to another country and not going there to do business like a lot of people do, but going there in the name of religion. And most people would have appreciated here's a man with the right doctrine, who's got a clean external life, who's going abroad at great sacrifice and suffering for his family and going there only for a religious cause. Now the average Christian would just admire that type of missionary, but not Jesus.

He said what type of convert do you make when you get there? That's the important thing, and that's what I'd say to all mission work in India. What type of convert do you make when you get to the mission field? Is it someone twofold a child of hell? Is it possible for a missionary to go and make someone who's twofold a child of hell? According to Matthew 23 15, yes. Is it possible for a missionary who's got the right doctrine to go and make someone who's twofold a child of hell? Yes.

We cannot play with people's lives. It's a very serious thing to play with people's lives. If you go out in the name of Christ, it's very important that you present a true gospel and obey what he said you must do, which is go into every nation and make disciples.

Disciples are those who love Jesus more than everyone else. And Luke 14 26 to 33 lays down the conditions of discipleship, which is love Jesus more than father, mother, brother, sister, wife, and children. This is the first thing we got to do when we go out as missionaries and preach the gospel anywhere, anywhere, whether it's in our own hometown or around the world, wherever we go, we got to make disciples.

We got to get the person to the place where he loves Christ more than father, mother, and all his relatives. Jesus said if a man loves father or mother more than me, he's not worthy of me. And we don't want a whole lot of people in a church who are not worthy of Jesus Christ, according to his own words, who are not disciples, more than his wife, more than his children, more than his brothers, more than his sisters.

That takes a while. And secondly, a disciple is one who takes up his cross every single day and follows Jesus. Luke 14 27 and Luke 9 23.

So if a person does not, is not willing to die to himself daily, you have not even taught him what discipleship is. And number three, he must be one who doesn't hold on to possessions. He got to give up his possessions.

If he holds on to his possessions, he's not fit to be a disciple. And this is what is lacking in so much of Christian preaching and missionary work. They're making converts.

Ask Jesus to come into your heart and ask him to forgive your sins. That's fine. If that was all that the Lord wanted, why in the world did he tell us to go and make disciples? Disciple is a learner and a follower.

Why in the world did he go tell us to go into all the world and teach them to do every single thing that I have commanded you? Matthew 28 verse 18 to 20. The neglected part of the great commission. So if I don't do that, it's possible for me to go, even as an evangelical Christian today, and go across land and sea and make someone twofold a child of hell.

Now I've often, I've thought about that. How does a person become a double a child of hell? I mean, child of hell itself is bad. How does he become double a child of hell? Have you ever thought of that? Twice as much a son of hell? See, everyone born into the world living in sin is on his way to destruction.

And according to that expression that Jesus uses, he would be a son of hell. But if you go there as an evangelical Christian and somehow brainwash that person into believing, just because he has mumbled some words, that he's now a child of God, even though he's not become a disciple at all. I mean, he doesn't even have an understanding of what taking up the cross means.

He doesn't know what it is to die to himself. He doesn't know what it is to love Jesus more than everybody on earth. But you convinced him that he's okay.

You see, you have immunized him that moment to hearing the gospel anymore, because he says, I'm a child of God now. I'm okay. I'm a child of God when he's not a child of God.

He's not a disciple, but you have convinced him with doctrinal brainwashing that he's a child of God. This is what it means to make a person twofold a child of hell. The other person who's not doctrinally brainwashed, who still says, I'm a heathen, I'm not a Christian, he's a single child of hell.

This is a double a child of hell, and this is the one that will never be converted. It's the other one who's a possibility of getting converted, because he doesn't even believe he's converted. When you make a person believe that he's converted and a disciple when he's not a disciple, you really made him twofold a child of hell.

And a lot of that is happening around the world. So it's not the question of the percentage of Christians that needs to increase in any land. It's the quality of the individual Christian that needs to be important.

Jesus was more interested in quality always. He never sought for numbers. He always spoke the hardest words when the great multitudes came to follow him, because he said, there's a price to be paid to follow me.

For the pearl of great price, you have to sell everything that you have. And if we don't proclaim that, the whole counsel of God, then we're going to have these converts who are twice the sons of hell. So we got to be careful that we don't come under that condemnation that Jesus gave to the Pharisees here.

You cross land and sea and make a proselyte and in the end he's twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Verse 16. Woe to you blind guides who say whoever swears by the temple, that's nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he's obligated.

Matthew 23 and verse 17. You fools and blind men, which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And whoever swears by the altar, you say that's nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he's obligated. You blind men, which is more important, the offering on the altar or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore he who swears, swears both by the altar and by everything in it.

And he who swears by the temple, swears both by the temple, by him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it. So here he's talking about little subtle changes of words and things which are not even mentioned in the law, which the Pharisees made little rules about saying this is okay, but that's not okay in the way you express certain words.

And that's also very common among many Christians. You know, nitpicking about words, whether you said it the right way or not. And you know, in those days, swearing was what they were thinking about.

They had to swear. And Jesus taught us, by the way, in Matthew 5, we are not to swear at all. So this business of swearing doesn't even apply to us, because Jesus said don't swear by anything.

When you say yes, it must be yes. When you say no, it must be no. But in those days, swearing was accepted under the law, because most of the time they told lies, and when a man was swearing, he was saying most of what he was really saying was by the temple or by the altar or by the sacrifice on the altar, I want to say that most of the time I tell lies, but right now I'm going to speak the truth.

That's the purpose of swearing. That means he's acknowledging that if he doesn't swear, he'll be telling lies. Now we don't need that type of thing today, not at all.

We don't swear by anything. We say I speak the truth whether I swear or not. My spoken word is as much of a commitment to what I believe and what I accept as if I had given a signed statement, signed in court on a proper stamp paper with a lot of witnesses.

It's as good as that, my spoken statement. That's how a Christian should be. I gave my word and I'll keep it.

There's a verse in the Psalms, which is a very interesting verse in this connection about our spoken words. It says in Psalm 15, who will dwell or abide permanently live in God's tent? Who will dwell in God's holy hill? One of the conditions, there are many things spoken there, when he walks with integrity, works righteousness, speaks the truth in his heart, does not slander with his tongue, does not take up any evil or reproach against neighbor, etc. And then it says, he honors those who fear the Lord, verse four, and the last part of verse four, he makes a promise.

Let me paraphrase it. He makes a promise and when he discovers that keeping that promise is going to hurt him, he doesn't change. He still goes by his word.

Amazing. Only such a person can live in God's holy hill. I remember once, some years ago, I was selling some item.

This is a fairly expensive item in my house, which I didn't need anymore. Some type of musical instrument with its stand and box and everything. And I offered it to somebody for a certain price and afterwards I discovered that it was actually costing much more than that.

And later on, a few days later, when he came to me, by then I had realized that I'd offered at a much lower price. And I hadn't sold it. He hadn't made an agreement with me or any such thing.

And when I discovered that this price was much higher than what I had offered, that I made a ridiculously low offer, and he came to get it, this is what the Lord said to me. You gave your word, keep it. If it's a loss, let it be a loss.

It's more important for your integrity as a Christian that you're known as a man who keeps his word. I gave it. I said, I don't care if I lose a few thousands of rupees, but I want to be known as one who speaks the truth.

I want to abide in the holy will of the Lord. I don't have to swear to do that. I could have told him, well, listen, I've changed my mind on that.

I'm not selling it, or some excuse like that. Or, hey, I discovered that the price is much more, so I have to, you know, change the price. But I'd given my word.

It's in these little things I find that the Lord tests us. I believe that the Lord tested me. And what he gave me in terms of anointing and holiness and power was a million times more than that little bit of money.

I wonder whether you realize how much you lose when you are not a person of integrity, when you don't, when your yes is not yes and your no is not no. When you change your mind just because you feel, hey, I'm going to make a little loss there. I can make a little profit by changing my word, telling a little lie.

I can be more accepted. There's so much of that in Christendom. And I believe that it's this subtle lying, and even among co-workers and all, that brings, that makes the Lord take away his anointing from people.

And very often it's not obvious, till a long time afterwards, that this brother has lost the anointing. And what's the reason? Because in little, little things, he didn't keep his word. So in this whole section of swearing, where the Lord has used a number of verses, for us in the new covenant, it is your yes must be yes, your no must be no, and when you make a promise, you don't break it.

Now, if you have made a promise, for example, to some cult organization or some satanic organization, when you become a Christian and you discover that was wrong, of course you can break it, because there you're trying to be faithful to God. I'm talking about examples where you're seeking your own. Now, if you break a promise because you are seeking to honor God's word now, for example, if you were engaged to be married to an unbeliever, and you're given a word to someone to marry you, but you're not yet married, and then you discover, then you're born again and say, you discover, hey, I'm not supposed to marry an unbeliever, you can break your word, because now you obey God, who is a higher authority, who says, don't be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, and now you're born again, the situation has changed, and so therefore you cannot marry, not because you're breaking your word, because you don't want to disobey God, that's different, and you can say that plainly, I would very much love to marry you, but I'm sorry I can't, because my loyalty to God is first, and he's told me that I must not marry an unbeliever.

So there are situations where we obey a higher authority, and then to break your word because you want to obey God is perfectly okay, but other than that, situations where you want to break your word because you're going to get more profit, or seek your own gain, or get some position, or something like that, that's completely wrong, it's better to suffer loss. Then we go to verse 23 in Matthew 23, quote you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites, for you tithe mint and dill and come in, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the Lord, justice and mercy and faithfulness, but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others, you blind guides, you strain at a gnat and swallow a camel, so was there anything wrong in their tithing mint and dill and come in, no, remember in those days tithing was not money, they were not office workers earning a salary in those days, they were not factory workers, they were farmers, their income came from their crops, and income means that was their profit came from maybe selling their crops, and that was their food, and so they farmed the land, and 10% of that was what they called tithe, they would carry the grain up to Jerusalem and give it to the Levites who didn't have any farms, and so it was perfectly right to be very exact and even the small little garden plants and every little thing they were growing in their kitchen garden, small little things they would find out how much they got and give 10% of that also to the Levites, and they were very particular about weighing out 10% of these little things like dill and come in, small little seeds etc., but they were not concerned being merciful to others, they were very hard on people, they were not concerned about faithfulness in little things, they were not concerned about being righteous and just in their dealings with others, they were not concerned about all that, but they were very concerned about these little little, make sure hey that's a little one gram less, let's add a little more and make it correct one tenth and take it, and what did the Lord say?

He says you know there are some weightier matters in the law, in Matthew 5 he said about least commandments, not all commandments have the same importance or value, it's very clear from what Jesus said here about weightier matters of the law, weightier provisions of the law in Matthew 23-23, and also what he said earlier in Matthew 5 about the least of the commandments in Matthew 5-19, so there are some commandments which are least and some which are greater and greatest, and there are other, there are weightier provisions in the law and not so important provisions of the law, all need to be kept, but some are more important than others, that's very clear, it's the New Testament too, there are commandments God has given and some are much more important than others, so if we keep the small

things and neglect the big things, we're Pharisees, that doesn't mean we keep the big things and ignore the small things, see that's what some people say when we talk about some of the small commandments, hey those are one of the small commandments, agreed, I'm not saying they are the weightiest, but shall we neglect them and just keep the big ones, what about the small ones, there are many small ones like it says a woman must veil her head, that's a small commandment, call no man on earth father, it's a small commandment, it's not the biggest thing in the world, the biggest thing is love God with all your heart, love your neighbor as yourself, so Jesus says those are the ones you must keep, the big ones, but don't neglect the smaller ones, because if you neglect the smaller ones you'll

be called least in the kingdom of heaven, so now the question is, here many people say Jesus said you must pay your tithe of these small things, that's right, Jesus also told the cleansed lepers go and show yourself to the priests, Jesus also told the rich young ruler who was seeking for eternal life, the way to eternal life is keep the commandments, all different from what we would say today, we don't tell any person who's healed to go and show himself to the priest, and we don't tell people who want eternal life to keep the commandments, then we go to verse 25 which we looked at earlier as well, what do you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites, because you clean the outside of the cup and dish but inside they're full of

robbery and self-indulgence, you blind pharisee first clean the inside

of the cup so that the outside of it may be clean also, in the old covenant you could only clean the outside of your life, you could not clean the inside, there were 10 commandments, nine of them related to the external life in exodus 20, only the last one you shall not desire your neighbor's wife or anything that's your neighbors, that was referring to inner life and that was put there just to teach people in Israel that the commandments don't finish with number nine, God's standard is much higher and inner life, but nobody could keep it, not even the great apostle Paul who could say I've lived with my good with a good conscience till today, Acts 23 one, where according to the righteousness of the law I am blameless, Philippians 3 verse 5 to 8, yet he says in Romans chapter 7 when it

comes to coveting, he says in verse 7 onwards, I found every type of coveting in my heart, I found I was disobeying the 10th commandment left right and center, even though I was very good on the outside, so even the great apostle Paul couldn't keep that 10th commandment, but he was honest about it and he cries out in Romans 7 says, oh wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from this death, this body of death, I want to be free, I want to live a pure life and therefore God delivered him, he said the law of the spirit has set me free from the law of sin and death, so that now as I walk in the spirit, the righteousness of the requirement of the law and thou shall not covet can be fulfilled inside me, but here the Pharisees were not concerned about that, they were not even seeking, they

just gave people a pretense that I'm very holy on the outside and the inside was dirty, now so Jesus said here, you must start with the inside, always start with the inside and then the outside will automatically be clean, if our mind is clean and our thoughts are clean, then the outside will be clean, that is the right order, we'll continue our study in the next episode.

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