

Matthew 23

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Matthew 23

follow the scribes and Pharisees; Do you believe in the wrong God ?

In the period after the Babylonian exile, the Jews continued to live according to the Law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments and various liturgical and civil provisions. During this time, the rabbis began to develop the oral law, and during this period, the Pharisees emphasized the importance of strict observance of the law. The scribes, especially the Sadducees, followed the Mosaic Law primarily and did not endorse the oral law. This led to disagreements and arguments between them. But they all obeyed the law of Moses.

The origins of the Pharisees can be traced back to Jewish history in the mid-2nd century BC. They began as a group dedicated to upholding Jewish traditions and laws, especially during foreign invasions and Hellenistic influences. Scribes, on the other hand, were religious scholars who specialized in copying and interpreting the law. Over time, these two groups became important and influential religious leaders in Jewish society during Jesus' time and were criticized by Jesus for their overly appearance-oriented behavior.

Jesus did not completely deny the law that the Pharisees and writers obeyed, but criticized them for focusing too much on outward forms and ignoring the true spirit behind the law—righteousness, love, and faithfulness. He emphasized honesty of heart and sincere faith in God. Jesus was simply criticizing them about the content and essence of the Law, and He wanted them not only to obey the Law, but also to understand its core spirit and put it into practice in their daily lives.

Jesus did not say that the belief in the Falices and civils was completely wrong. Jesus wanted them to understand that faith should be embodied in love, mercy, and righteousness, not just in the superficial observance of the law.

Jesus did not deny the authority of the Old Testament. His emphasis was on a deep understanding of the law and the teachings of the prophets, rather than just superficial obedience. Jesus' teachings are a deepening of the spirit of the Old Testament.

Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it, which means that He wanted to fulfill and explain the true meaning of the Law in depth, teaching people how to truly practice God's will in their lives. Jesus' words were indeed harsh, but he did so to expose and correct the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of religious leaders and to make people realize the value of true faith.

In Matthew 23, Jesus speaks to the crowd and his disciples and criticizes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes. They were outwardly law-keeping, but they were burdensome. Jesus emphasized the need to serve others humbly, because the greatest in heaven is the most humble. In verse 9, Jesus said, "Do not call the father of the earth," to remind believers to devote themselves to the worship of the Father and not to over-exalt earthly figures. This is not to call for unfilial piety, but to emphasize that the highest worship should be dedicated to God.

The greatest ministry is found in verse 11: "Whoever is greatest among you will be your servant." This quote highlights the importance of humility and service to others. True greatness is not in power or status, but in the willingness to serve others.

Chapter 23 has other teachings, including Jesus' list of the seven plagues of the Pharisees. He denounced them for hypocrisy, emphasizing that outward religious behavior is meaningless without inner sincerity. He also reminded people to be merciful, righteous, and faithful, and not just to focus on rituals. The whole chapter emphasizes the importance of inner reverence and piety.

In verses 37–39, Jesus lamented Jerusalem's refusal to accept Him and prophesied that disaster was coming. He expressed his sorrow over the disobedience of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and prophesied that their homes would become desolate. This passage expresses Jesus' sorrow and warning to those who reject Him, as well as prophecies for the future. This implies a future time when the inhabitants of Jerusalem will recognize Jesus as He and He will be accepted and honored again.

Matthew 23 focuses on Jesus' harsh criticism of the religious leaders of his day, represented by the scribes and Pharisees, and as a warning to the disciples and the crowd against imitating their hypocrisy. The chapter can be divided into three sections:

- Characteristics of the Pharisees' Behavior Jesus reminded the crowd and his disciples to beware of the scribes and Pharisees.
- The Seven Plagues of the Pharisees The "Seven Plagues" are Jesus' rebukes to the Pharisees and scribes, including: hypocritically blocking others from entering the kingdom of heaven and not allowing people to understand the true meaning of the law; Focusing only on the details of the sacrifice, but ignoring justice, mercy, and faithfulness; Clean on the outside but filthy on the inside; Pretending to be pious but full of hypocrisy. Jesus condemned them for hypocrisy and misdirection.
- The destruction of the city of hypocrites prophesied that Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees mainly in the following ways:

- Words and deeds are inconsistent They can say what they can't do.
- Greedy for vanity likes to show off oneself and wants high positions and honorific titles.

- Blocking the Way of Grace He himself does not enter the kingdom of heaven, nor does he allow others to enter. The Pharisees focused too much on the outward manifestations of the religious law and neglected the more important spiritual connotations, such as justice, mercy, and faith. They pay lip service to the law, but they don't actually practice it, but instead prevent ordinary people from understanding and following the true faith. So, Jesus accused them of not entering the kingdom of heaven and of hindering others from entering the kingdom of heaven.
- Oppressing weak limbs and embezzling widows' property.
- Giving false leads to seduce people into religion, but making them children of hell.
- Without spiritual vision, I don't know what is important.
- Sticking to words and ignoring reality does not practice justice, mercy, and faithfulness.
- Focus on the outside, ignore the inside Wash the cups and plates on the outside, but inside is full of blackmail and debauchery.
- They have a good look on the outside, but they are filthy on the inside, like a whitewashed grave.
- Destroy the revelation of God and kill the prophet.

When our actions are consistent with our faith, we can truly reflect God's love and truth.

We pray:

"Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us faith and life. In this world, help us to match Your truth and love with our words and deeds every day. Help us to live out Your teachings steadfastly in the face of challenges and difficulties, so that our lives can be a testimony of Your grace. May our actions glorify You and attract more people to Know You. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. "

Matthew 23

Amplified Bible

Pharisaism Exposed

23 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, ² saying: "The scribes and Pharisees have seated themselves in Moses' chair [of authority as teachers of the Law]; ³ so practice and observe everything they tell you, but do not do as they do; for they preach [things], but do not practice *them*. ⁴ The scribes and Pharisees tie up ^[a] heavy loads [that are hard to bear] and place them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not lift a finger [to make them lighter]. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their ^[b] phylacteries (tefillin) wide [to make them more conspicuous] and make their ^[c] tassels long. ⁶ They love the place of distinction *and* honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues [those on the platform near the scrolls of the Law, facing the congregation], ⁷ and to be greeted [with respect] in the market places *and* public forums, and to have people call them Rabbi. ⁸ But do not be called Rabbi (Teacher); for One is your Teacher, and you are all [equally] brothers. ⁹ Do not call *anyone* on earth [who guides you spiritually] your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. ¹⁰ Do not *let yourselves* be called leaders *or* teachers; for One is your Leader (Teacher), the Christ. ¹¹ But the greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be raised to honor.

Eight Woes

¹³ “But woe (judgment is coming) to you, [self-righteous] scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven in front of people; for you do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow those who are [in the process of] entering to do so. ¹⁴ [d] [Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you swallow up widows’ houses, and to cover it up you make long prayers; therefore you will receive the greater condemnation.]

¹⁵ “Woe to you, [self-righteous] scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel over sea and land to make a single proselyte (convert to Judaism), and when he becomes a convert, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

¹⁶ “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears [an oath] by the sanctuary of the temple, that is nothing (non-binding); but whoever swears [an oath] by the gold of the temple is obligated [as a debtor to fulfill his vow and keep his promise].’ ¹⁷ You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the sanctuary of the temple that sanctified the gold? ¹⁸ And [you scribes and Pharisees say], ‘Whoever swears [an oath] by the altar, that is nothing (non-binding), but whoever swears [an oath] by the offering on it, he is obligated [as a debtor to fulfill his vow and keep his promise].’ ¹⁹ You [spiritually] blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? ²⁰ Therefore, whoever swears [an oath] by the altar, swears both by it and by everything [offered] on it. ²¹ And whoever swears [an oath] by the sanctuary of the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells within it. ²² And whoever swears [an oath] by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

²³ “Woe to you, [self-righteous] scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you give a tenth (tithe) of your mint and dill and cumin [focusing on minor matters], and have neglected the weightier [more important moral and spiritual] provisions of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the [primary] things you ought to have done without neglecting the others. ²⁴ You [spiritually] blind guides, who strain out a gnat [consuming yourselves with miniscule matters] and swallow a camel [ignoring and violating God’s precepts]!

²⁵ “Woe to you, [self-righteous] scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion *and* robbery and self-indulgence (unrestrained greed). ²⁶ You [spiritually] blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the plate [examine and change your inner self to conform to God’s precepts], so that the outside [your public life and deeds] may be clean also.

²⁷ “Woe to you, [self-righteous] scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which look beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. ²⁸ So you, also, outwardly seem to be just *and* upright to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

²⁹ “Woe to you, [self-righteous] scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build tombs for the prophets and decorate *and* adorn the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ and you say, ‘If we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have joined them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.’ ³¹ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the [allotted] measure *of the guilt* of your fathers’ *sins*. ³³ You [e]serpents, you spawn of vipers, how can you escape the penalty of hell?

³⁴ “Therefore, take notice, I am sending you prophets and wise men [interpreters, teachers] and scribes [men educated in the Mosaic Law and the writings of the prophets]; some of them you will kill

and *even* crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues, and pursue *and* persecute from city to city,³⁵ so that you will come *the guilt of* all the blood of the righteous shed on earth, from the blood of righteous ^[1]Abel to the blood of Zechariah [the priest], the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.³⁶ I assure you *and* most solemnly say to you, [the judgment for] all these things [these vile and murderous deeds] will come on this generation.

Lament over Jerusalem

³⁷ “[g]O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who murders the prophets and stones [to death] those [messengers] who are sent to her [by God]! How often I wanted to gather your children together [around Me], as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.³⁸ Listen carefully: your house is being left to you desolate [completely abandoned by God and destitute of His protection]! ³⁹For I say to you, you will not see Me again [ministering to you publicly] until you say, ‘Blessed [to be celebrated with praise] is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

Matthew 23 is a powerful chapter in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus delivers a series of stern rebukes to the religious leaders of His time — the scribes and Pharisees. He highlights their hypocrisy, pride, and failure to live according to the truth of God's Word. This chapter provides significant lessons for followers of Christ, as it contrasts false piety with genuine humility and devotion.

Full Description of Matthew 23:

1. Jesus' Initial Warning (Matthew 23:1-12):

- **Verses 1-3:** Jesus begins by addressing the crowds and His disciples, acknowledging that the scribes and Pharisees sit in a position of authority, teaching the Law of Moses. Jesus encourages the people to follow their teachings but not their actions because they do not practice what they preach.
- **Verses 4-7:** Jesus describes how the religious leaders impose heavy burdens on others, demanding strict adherence to the Law while not lifting a finger to help. They seek public recognition, enjoy titles, and love to be honored in public places, showing off their religious status.
- **Verses 8-12:** Jesus calls for humility, instructing His followers not to seek titles or recognition for themselves. "The greatest among you shall be your servant." True greatness in the Kingdom of God is found in serving others, not in self-exaltation.

2. Woes to the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:13-36):

This section contains seven "woes" — strong condemnations that Jesus pronounces against the religious leaders.

- **Woe #1 (Matthew 23:13):** Jesus condemns the Pharisees for shutting the door to the Kingdom of Heaven for others, preventing people from entering, while they themselves refuse to enter.
- **Woe #2 (Matthew 23:15):** He rebukes them for making converts, but turning them into "twice as much a child of hell" as themselves, due to their false teachings.
- **Woe #3 (Matthew 23:16-22):** Jesus condemns them for their hypocrisy in making oaths, focusing on the gold of the temple and the altar, rather than the sacredness of God's presence. He warns that they are misplacing the importance of oaths and the sacred.

- **Woe #4 (Matthew 23:23-24):** He accuses them of tithing small amounts (like mint, dill, and cumin) but neglecting the more important matters of the Law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness. They are "strain[ing] out a gnat but swallow[ing] a camel," missing the heart of God's commandments.
- **Woe #5 (Matthew 23:25-26):** Jesus calls them "whitewashed tombs" because they clean the outside of the cup and dish (appear righteous outwardly) but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. He calls them to cleanse the inside first so that the outside will be clean.
- **Woe #6 (Matthew 23:27-28):** He compares them to "whitewashed tombs," beautiful on the outside but full of dead men's bones and uncleanness inside. They appear righteous but are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.
- **Woe #7 (Matthew 23:29-36):** Jesus condemns them for building tombs for the prophets, claiming they would not have killed them, but in reality, they are the descendants of those who killed the prophets. He prophesies that they will also fill up the measure of their ancestors' sins by rejecting and killing the true messengers of God.

3. Jesus' Lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39):

- In these final verses, Jesus expresses His sorrow for Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her. He laments that He has often desired to gather the children of Jerusalem as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but they were unwilling. He predicts the desolation of the city and promises that they will not see Him again until they acknowledge Him as the Messiah.

Important Verses:

1. Matthew 23:11-12:

- *"The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."*
- This highlights the principle of humility in the Kingdom of God. Greatness is found in serving others, not in seeking power or recognition.

2. Matthew 23:13:

- *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to."*
- Jesus condemns the Pharisees for being a stumbling block to others, keeping them from entering the Kingdom of God through their false teachings.

3. Matthew 23:23:

- *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."*

- This verse emphasizes the importance of justice, mercy, and faithfulness, and how religious rituals or outward acts are meaningless without a heart that reflects God's true values.

4. **Matthew 23:37:**

- *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."*
- This poignant expression of Jesus' heart reveals His sorrow over the rejection of His message by the people of Jerusalem, highlighting God's deep desire to save and protect His people.

Spiritual Influence:

Matthew 23 holds deep spiritual lessons and warnings:

1. **Humility and Servanthood:**

- The Kingdom of God values humility over pride. Jesus teaches that the greatest leaders in God's eyes are those who serve others, not those who seek to be exalted. This calls believers to examine their hearts for pride, ambition, and the desire for recognition.

2. **Authenticity in Faith:**

- Jesus condemns outward religious acts done for show, revealing the importance of a genuine heart before God. True righteousness is not about external appearances but about living with integrity, justice, mercy, and humility. This challenges Christians to live authentically, without hypocrisy, and to ensure their actions align with their beliefs.

3. **God's Desire for Repentance:**

- Jesus' lament over Jerusalem demonstrates His heart for repentance and the salvation of His people. It emphasizes the importance of responding to God's calling and not rejecting His messengers. The rejection of God's truth leads to destruction, but God's grace offers mercy to those who repent.

4. **The Danger of Legalism:**

- The Pharisees' focus on minor details of the Law, while neglecting the more important matters of justice, mercy, and faithfulness, highlights the danger of legalism. It's not enough to follow religious rules; one must live out the heart of God's commandments — love, mercy, and righteousness.

5. **The Call to Examine Our Own Hearts:**

- Jesus challenges us to examine our own hearts and motives. Are we living for external approval, or are we genuinely seeking to serve God and others with humility? Are we more concerned with religious rituals than with the true spirit of God's law?

In conclusion, **Matthew 23** calls us to humility, authenticity, and repentance. It serves as a stark reminder that God desires hearts that are humble, just, merciful, and faithful, not outward appearances that mask

inner hypocrisy. Jesus' words challenge us to reflect on how we live out our faith and how we treat others in our journey toward spiritual growth.