



PITWM VERSE BY VERSE
MATTHEW 23:1-8, 23-26
LESSON: UNJUST LEADERS—July 8, 2018

INTRODUCTION:

The true nature of the religionists, the Scribes, and Pharisees is clearly seen for what it is, as Christ opened up the hypocrisy of their lives and religion point by point. Christ's warnings stood as a symbol of the false religions of the world. The great tragedy was that they were supposed to be the godly teachers and leaders; God's very own representatives and messengers to the people, yet, they were so far removed from God that they were unable to recognize God's very own Son.

LESSON: I. PHARISAIC PARADOX Matthew 23:1-4

Pharisaic relates to the Pharisees who observed the letter of the Law. Paradox is a statement that seems self-contradictory or absurd but, in reality expresses a possible truth. One half is viewed "justified"; the other half of the paradox is viewed by the Pharisee in a self-righteous manner. The Paradox Jesus wants to relate is to follow what they tell you, but not what they do (v.3).

23:1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples. Jesus spoke to the multitude, and to His disciples, not to the religionists, not to the Pharisees and Scribes. There are at least four reasons why Christ warned the multitude and disciples at this point.

1. Everyone needs to know what is true and what is false in religion. Man-made religion always includes some truth and some error.
2. Everyone needs to have the hypocrisy and sin of religion exposed. When men add to or take away from God's revealed truth, it creates and causes hypocrisy and sin within religion.
3. Everyone needs to be warned against following the error of religion. If a person follows false religion he is doomed.
4. Everyone needs to have his false ideas about Christ corrected. The false teaching and attacks of the religionists had influenced the people.

There is always more hope for people to repent and change when brought to the light and their heart is touched because it's about relationship, not religion.

23:2 Saying The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:— Jesus tells the multitude and disciples that the Scribes and Pharisees "*sit in Moses' seat*" (*seat of authority*). Moses was a great leader teaching and interpreting God's Law. The "*Scribes*" copied the Scriptures by hand. They were the teachers of the law. The Pharisees means "*separated one*" and were strict in keeping the law. So for the Scribes and Pharisees to "*sit in Moses' seat*", it represented the highest authority to instruct people in the Law. They were responsible for teaching and interpreting God's Word just as Moses had done. They were not to teach false religion. All teachers shall be held accountable for how they "*sit in Moses' seat*"; how they sit in their position as teachers and interpreters of God's Word. It is a terrible thing for a false teacher to "*sit in Moses' seat*." The

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most severe judgment awaits those who teach error.

23:3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. Whatever the Scribes and Pharisees told them to practice and observe, they were to observe and do. "*Observe*" means to obey the truth of what they say, in so far as it is God's Word. But, they were not to imitate their works (wrong actions or their wrong examples). The religious leaders would tell the people to obey these rules, but they didn't do so themselves.

1. Jesus is condemning false religion and teachers, but not the truth.
2. Jesus is saying that teaching the truth does not mean that a person is acceptable to God. Being acceptable to God also depends on living the truth. One is acceptable because he walks in the truth day by day.
3. We must separate the office from the officer; the ministry from the minister, the church from the people, the truth from the teaching; the doctrine from the practice; the preaching and practice. "*Try the spirit whether they be of God.*" Every man is human, and every man comes short, but God's Word is perfect.

23:4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. Another translation: *Common English Bible*— "*For they tie together heavy packs that are impossible to carry. They put them on the shoulders of others, but are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.*" *Message Bible*— "*Instead of giving you God's Law as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. They seem to take pleasure in watching you stagger under these loads, and wouldn't think of lifting a finger to help.*" Four heavy burdens were laid upon the shoulders of men.

1. God's Word and law can be imposed by men upon men in such a strict and severe way that mercy is lacking.
2. Religion and men can add to God's Word through rules, regulations, rituals, observances, and traditions. Such tend to become more important than the truth.
3. Religion and men can deny and take away from God's Word, leaving men to stumble around searching for the truth within themselves and other imperfect and frail men.
4. Religion and men can exercise undue authority, lording it over people, insisting that tradition and ritual and other man-made burdens be kept.

Many are willing to impose the rules upon others, but not upon themselves. They will preach and teach the rules to others, and bind them to keep the rules. The shoulders of others are weighed down ever so heavily, yet the ones teaching will not try to keep them. They will not lift their own fingers to carry the weight of the rule or restriction.

II. PHARISAIC PRETENSIONS MATTHEW 23:5-8

Pharisaic Pretensions is that the Pharisees' actions prove that they're much less holy than they pretend to be. Their pretense is to impress other people with how clever or important they are (vv.5-8).

23:5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and

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enlarge the borders of their garments,— Evidently, all the works of the Scribes and Pharisees were just for show. They gave a show. ¹All their prayers, alms deeds, and fasting, were all done in a public manner, that men might behold them, and they might have applause and glory from them. Their works was from a legalistic heart or a heart of obligation (duty), not from a free or cheerful heart or a heart of love. Whatever good they did; whatever they gave was for the people's applause.

1. They phylacteries (little leather type boxes) containing a piece of parchment with four passages of Scripture written on it and worn on their foreheads and arms. The Scriptures were Exo.13:1-10; 13:11; Deut.6:4-9; and Deut.11:13-21. They tied the boxes to the front of their heads. Most Jews wore those boxes at home or in the synagogue at the time of prayer. The great fault of the religionist was that they interpreted these passages literally and they enlarged the little leather boxes; made their scripture boxes wider to draw attention to themselves; to make them more noticeable as being religious. The true meaning was to show that we are to have the Word of God in our minds just as if we had them before our eyes, which they did not.

They wanted to be seen by men as they changed their appearance, dress, and clothing to draw attention to themselves.

2. They enlarged the borders of their garments. As to God's instructions (Numbers 15:38-39), on their garments, they put fringes on the border with a blue cord / ribbon to remind them of their heritage and to obey the Commandments of God, and not to be seen following their own desires. This was from generation to generation. When a person noticed them, he was to be reminded to keep God's commandments. Jesus does not want anyone to dress to attract attention. The religionists did it to appear righteous. They didn't care about being holy, just looking holy in order to receive the people's admiration and praise.

23:6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,— The "*uppermost rooms*" was the most honored place at the feasts or banquet table. The "*chief seats*" were the best front seats.

3. They loved the positions of honor, special seats, and places of recognition. Can you see that today? Note, what is condemned: not being in these positions and places, but it is the love of them; the prideful feeling of being in the place or position that's wrong.

23:7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. As they walked in the market places they were greeted with men calling them Rabbi.

4. They loved the titles that honored and exalted them. The title "*Rabbi*" meant teacher or master. It carried with it the modern idea of "*Doctor*" "*Master*", or "*My Lord*." It was a title that took a man who was supposed to be God's messenger and said, "*Here he is, this is he.*" It honored the man and not the Lord.

23:8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. ²The direction here is an express command to His disciples not to receive such a title of distinction. The

¹ <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/23-5.htm>

² <http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/23927/eVerseID/23927/RTD/barnes>

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reason which He gave was that He was Himself their Master and Teacher, They were themselves brethren; equal in authority, and should neither covet nor receive a title which implied either an elevation of one above another, or which appeared to infringe on the absolute right of the Saviour to be their only Teacher and Master.

III. PHARISAIC PIETY MATTHEW 23:23-24

Pharisaic Piety is the rigid observance of external forms of religion or conduct without devoutness (piety goodness; godliness) of the heart. Their visible piety was only external to the smaller things, but truly blind leaders who kept other things in the law undone (vv.23-24).

23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Now, Jesus is talking to the Scribes and Pharisees, saying "Woe", meaning He expressed misery and despair; sorry that would await—you hypocrites. Two points:

1. Religionists stress the lighter duties and omit the greater duties.
2. Religionists avoid the lesser sins, but commit the greater sins.

The tithe was to be corn, wine, and oil. A "tithe" or tenth of all produce was by the Mosaic Law to be given for the use of the priests and Levites. They paid a tithe of **mint** leaf from their garden, and **anise** (*dill which grows bold wild and is cultivated where fruits being used for medicine*), and **cumin** (*used as spice in seasoning*). However, the Pharisees expanded the tithe where they even included the leaves and stalks of the plants in their tithes. Jesus tells them that they have omitted and ignored the more important matters like justice mercy, and faith. They should have cared about these things instead of omitting them.

- There is justice: treating our neighbor as we should; never being guilty of injustice.
- There is mercy: showing care, concern, kindness, and tenderness to all who are weak.
- There is faith: believing God and trusting Him to fulfill His promises.

God was saying that these were the weightier matters of the law. Therefore, omitting the weightier matters they missed the opportunity to treat all people with pure justice and mercy, and to have faith to believe God in all things.

23:24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Still calling these scribes and Pharisees names—blind guides (leaders). The Pharisees strained their water so they wouldn't accidentally swallow a gnat (*an unclean insect according to the law*), and they strained their wine before drinking it to avoid touching or swallowing anything unclean. And swallowing a camel was sarcastic, but the point was while they thought about the smallest insect, they failed to think about the largest animal. Both were unclean. But in their wanting to be pious, they were blind leaders leaving the other things in the law undone.

IV. PHARISAIC PURITY MATTHEW 23:25-26

Pharisaic Purity dealt with the Pharisees purity (pureness or cleanliness); the matters of Levitical ceremonial laws and dietary purity. Their ritual was to be clean on the outside, but no true change or cleanness on the inside (internally. They appeared clean, but were corrupt) (vv.25-26).

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23:25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Jesus is still talking to the Scribes and Pharisees, saying "Woe", meaning He expressed misery and despair; sorry that would await—you hypocrites.

1. The **outside** of the cup and platter of the religionists appeared clean. They cleaned the outside of the cup and platter (dish) for it was the outside that was seen. They guarded against scandalous sins, sins that would damage their image and reputation among neighbors and the public. Publicly they walked uprightly, just as the public thought they should.
2. The **inside** of the cup and platter of the religionists was dirty. The inside was not seen by men, so they paid little attention. They were full of violent behavior and uncontrolled desire. For you see, the Pharisees obtained by extorting wrongfully from others. While ceremonially clean on the outside, they had corrupt hearts.

They operated in external ceremonies, but no true internal change.

23:26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Jesus is still calling these scribes and Pharisees names—blind. So, vice-versa if they would just cleanse the inside of the cup and platter (dish) first, then the outside of them would be clean also. A man can have the very best environment and education and still be evil. It is not the environment and education that changes the evil within men. It is God. Let God change the heart and then a man will be clean on the outside.

SUMMARY:

Jesus spoke to the multitude, and to His disciples, not to the religionists; not to the Pharisees and Scribes. Jesus exposes the true hostility and hypocrisy of the religious leaders of Israel. He tells the multitude and disciples that the Scribes and Pharisees "*sit in Moses' seat*" (*seat of authority*). And whatever the Scribes and Pharisees told them to practice and observe, they were to observe and do. But, they were not to imitate their works (wrong actions or their wrong examples). They imposed heavy burdens upon the shoulders of others. They are weighed down ever so heavily, yet the Scribes and Pharisees themselves don't try to keep them; will not lift their fingers to carry the weight of the rule or restriction (**23:1-4**).

Evidently all the works of the Scribes and Pharisees were just for show, for they made broad phylacteries and enlarging long fringes on their garment to be seen of men. They loved the places of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues. They loved it when the people greeted them in the marketplaces, calling them rabbi. Jesus tells the multitude and His disciples not to use religious titles like "Rabbi", "Father", or "Teacher," for they had one master, and that is Christ alone, and all of them are brethren (**23:5-8**).

Woe was pronounced upon the Scribes and Pharisees in committing to the lesser things, while omitting the weightier matters (**23:23-24**).

Woe was pronounced upon the Scribes and Pharisees in appearing clean on the out, but dirty on the inside (**23:25-26**).