

Jesus: No Spin Matthew Chapter Twenty Three: The Masks We Wear

personal / group study for use with the message of March 14th and 15th, 2009

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you much obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach” (Matthew 23:2-3).

What is detestable to God? It seems that people who teach “Do as I say, not as I do” are detestable to God. Jesus called them frauds! He said the Pharisees and teachers of the law were putting road blocks between people and heaven. He said they were placing heavy loads on men’s shoulders. Chapter twenty three is entirely Jesus’ rebuke against the religious leaders who should have been leading the people of Israel toward repentance, but instead were “blind guides.”

Introduction.

There are seven woes Jesus pronounces in this lament over Israel’s leaders. As you study this chapter, think about the masks you wear.

Read.

Matthew 23

Seven Woes

¹Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ²“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. ³So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

⁵“Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries^[a] wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’

⁸“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. ⁹And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ.^[b] ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

¹³“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.^[c]

¹⁵“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

¹⁶“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’ ¹⁷You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? ¹⁸You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.’ ¹⁹You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. ²²And he who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.

²³“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. 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. ²⁴You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

²⁵“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

²⁷"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. ²⁸In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

²⁹"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. ³⁰And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' ³¹So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. ³²Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!

³³"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? ³⁴Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. ³⁵And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.

³⁷"O 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, but you were not willing. ³⁸Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'^{dj}"

**All scripture taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.*

Questions.

Philip Yancey said, "If grace is so amazing why don't Christians show more of it?"

ThinkAboutIt...

1. Are you open (transparent) in your relationship with God and with others?
2. Are you following a list of "dos and don'ts" that make you look good to others?
3. Are you judging other people and their walk with God by a man-made template?

ReflectOnIt...

4. Why does Jesus tell the people to listen to and respect the Jewish leaders?
5. Because the Jewish leaders are influencing others was Jesus harsher on them than He would have been with an ordinary citizen? Why or Why not? (see James 3:1) ?
6. Do you sense that Jesus was sorrowful over the behavior of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees? Explain why you think He was or wasn't.
7. What did Jesus say the religious leaders loved?
8. In Matthew 23:8-10, Jesus says not to call anyone Rabbi or Father. Why not?
9. List each of the seven "woes" Jesus declares.

RespondToIt...

10. How can you live this week as an example to others without being pious or judgmental?
11. How can you make sure your motives are pure?
12. What can you do to serve others in Christ's name and to point them to Him?

You may want to return to Matthew Chapter 15 to reread Jesus' discussion of people who give God lip service, but their hearts are far from Him. The religious traditions became more important to them than God's word.