

Review

In Jerusalem for the upcoming Passover, Jesus has been being harassed by the religious leaders of the people all day. Now, He turns to the crowds gathered for the holiday and begins to warn them about these leaders...

23:1-3 Do What They Say, Not What They Do

"Sitting in the chair of Moses," was a figure of speech, describing the bringing forth of the Law of God. Jesus told the people to do what the scribes and Pharisees said when they read the Law. However, their actions were very different from their teaching of the Word of God, so Jesus said, "Don't do what they do."

23:4-12 Exalting Themselves

They were willing to put religious burdens on the people, but made sure that their religion prevented themselves from doing the same. All the rules they made for themselves were for appearance's sake, for them to be recognized. Jesus lists some examples of this behavior.

Phylacteries are leather straps with containers. One is worn on the left arm, with a satchel, the other is worn on the forehead with a box. Inside the satchel and the box are pieces of parchment with certain Bible verses written in Hebrew, including,

Deut. 11:18 "You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.

The tassels had been commanded by God:

Num. 15:38-39 "...they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD..."

The scribes and Pharisees made the boxes of their phylacteries huge, and made their tassels ridiculously long - all for the purpose of be-

ing noticed by people. "My, what a religious man you must be!"

They also made sure that people called them respectful names like, "Rabbi," "Father," and "Leader." But Jesus said that people are equally under God, Who alone should be getting these respectful titles.

That's what amazes me about the title "Reverend." It means, "worthy of reverence, to be revered." But only God is worthy of our reverence! Instead of looking for respect, we should be looking to serve.

23:13 Woe To You

Over the next 21 verses, Jesus will use the phrase "woe to you" eight times. "Woe" is an interjection implying, "You are in store for deep suffering, dreadful affliction, ruinous trouble, and terrible grief."

Shutting Off The Kingdom Of Heaven

These religious leaders were in a position to usher people into the kingdom of God, but instead, they were preventing people from entering. They were making it impossible for people to know God the way He intended, or be approached in the way He desired.

23:14 Devoring Widows' Houses

The scribes and Pharisees were excellent manipulators. They easily took advantage of women whose husbands had died. They would show up, pretending to be there offering religious service, but in reality, their motive was to maneuver their way into collecting donations, fees, and contributions, until the woman had nothing left.

This is the same secret to financial success that many televangelists are using today. Paul described them as,

2Tim. 3:6-7 ...those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

23:15 Corrupting Proselytes

These men went to great lengths to convert people to their religion.

But they were simply adding to their own numbers, not adding to the kingdom of God. It is a sad fact that legalists just breed worse legalists.

23:16-22 Rules For Swearing

They also made rules that sound more like children's word games. "I get the front seat!" "No, it doesn't count, because you didn't call 'shot-gun!'" "Hey, you promised!" "No, it doesn't count, because I had my fingers crossed!"

In their case, it was, "You swore by the temple that you would do this!" "No, it didn't count, because I didn't swear by the GOLD of the temple!"

23:23-24 Tithing But Neglecting

The scribes and Pharisees were also very religious in their observance of the Law - at least in some of it. But other parts, they would completely neglect. Jesus uses the example that they tithed ten percent of the smallest spices, actually counting out, "Nine for me, one for God..."

And yet, they were totally ignoring the far more important parts of the Word of God.

He uses the phrase,

Matt. 23:24 "...who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"

In Leviticus 11, there is a long list of animals that are unclean to eat. The smallest on the list are the winged insects that walk on all fours, of which the gnat is the smallest (11:23), and the largest on the list is the camel (11:4). Jesus is saying, "You're very diligent to observe these little minutia, but you're missing the biggest stuff! Is tithing more important than loving? Is giving an offering more important than ministering to widows and orphans?"

23:25-26 Cleaning The Outside Of The Cup

Anyone who's ever washed a dish knows that it's more important to clean the inside of the cup and the bowl than the outside. If you only polish up the outside, but leave all the junk on the inside, then you're going to make someone sick. But in spite of that common sense, these

Jews had decided that hypocrisy was the way to go - just get a slick and smooth appearance, and it won't matter what's beneath it.

23:27-28 Like Whitewashed Tombs

One of the interesting facts about humans is that we often feel the need to dress up graves. My grandparents are interred in a mausoleum that is simply gorgeous. Fountains and rivers, statues and trees, marble benches. It's a beautiful place that you'd want to go and spend your lunch hours. But if you stop and think about it, right behind each of the stones on the wall is a rotting corpse.

This is what religious hypocrisy is like. All of the beauty of outward religion. But...

1Sam. 16:7 "...God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

23:29-33 The Guilt Of Your Fathers

Speaking of tombs, the scribes and Pharisees put much money and effort into building and beautifying the tombs of the prophets. But it was their own ancestors who had killed the prophets. Of course, they would say, "If it were us, we never would have done that!" And yet, even now, they are plotting the death of Jesus. They will fill up the measure of the guilt of their fathers by killing the Son of God, just as Jesus had spoken in the parables earlier that day (Matt. 21).

23:34-39 Blessed Is He

The Jews have signed their death warrant. By killing Jesus and the apostles He will be sending, the total destruction of Jerusalem will come upon them. In 70AD, less than 40 years in the future, the armies of Titus will completely destroy the city and those who live in it.

But Jesus gives them a promise: One day they will cry out for Jesus' return, and He will come back.