

JESUS DENOUNCES THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

[BIBLE TEXT](#) : Matthew 23:1-39

LESSON 222 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren" (Matthew 23:8).

[BIBLE TEXT in King James Version](#)

Matthew 23:1-39

¹ Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,
² Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:
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.
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.
⁵ But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,
⁶ And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,
⁷ And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.
⁸ But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren.
⁹ And call no *man* your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.
¹⁰ Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, *even* Christ.
¹¹ But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.
¹² And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.
¹³ But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.
¹⁴ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.
¹⁵ Woe unto you, scribes and

[BIBLE REFERENCES:](#)

I Pharisaical Religion

1 The Pharisees proclaimed the Law of Moses, but they did not practice what they preached, Matthew 23:1-4;

Matthew 21:28

²⁸ But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.

Matthew 21:30

³⁰ And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I *go*, sir: and went not.

Luke 6:46

⁴⁶ And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

Titus 1:16

¹⁶ They profess that they know God; but in works they deny *him*, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

2 The works of the Pharisees were done to be seen of men, Matthew 23:5-7;

Matthew 6:2

² Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

Matthew 6:5

⁵ And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

Matthew 6:16

¹⁶ Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

John 5:44

⁴⁴ How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that *cometh* from God only?

II One Master

1 Christ is the only Master in the Kingdom of Heaven, Matthew 23:8,10

2 No man is to be considered the church father, for God is our Father in Heaven, Matthew 23:9;

1 Corinthians 8:6

⁶ But to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him.

Ephesians 4:6

⁶ One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

Hebrews 12:9

⁹ Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected *us*, and we gave *them* reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

3 The man who would be great in the Kingdom of Heaven must necessarily be the servant of all, Matthew 23:11, 12;

Matthew 5:19

¹⁹ Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do

Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

¹⁶ Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

¹⁷ Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

¹⁸ And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

¹⁹ Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

²⁰ Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.

²¹ And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.

²² And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

²³ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes 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.

²⁴ Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

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.

²⁶ Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that *which is* within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

²⁷ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness.

²⁸ Even so ye also outwardly appear

and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Luke 1:52

⁵² He hath put down the mighty from *their* seats, and exalted them of low degree.

III Condemnation of the Hypocrite

- 1 Pretense will bring the greater punishment to the guilty, Matthew 23:13-15;

Mark 12:38-40

³⁸ And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and *love* salutations in the marketplaces,

³⁹ And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts:

⁴⁰ Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

Acts 8:18-23

¹⁸ And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

¹⁹ Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

²⁰ But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

²¹ Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

²² Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

²³ For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and *in* the bond of iniquity.

- 2 False teaching was decried by the Lord Jesus, Matthew 23:16-22;

Matthew 15:9

⁹ But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.

1 Timothy 6:3-5

³ If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

⁴ He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,

⁵ Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

Titus 1:10-11

¹⁰ For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision:

¹¹ Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

2 Peter 2:1

¹ But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

- 3 Judgment, mercy, and faith have their important place in God's divine economy for His church, Matthew 23:23;

Deuteronomy 10:12

¹² And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,

Hosea 6:6

⁶ For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

²⁹ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

³⁰ And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

³¹ Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

³² Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

³³ Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

³⁴ Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and *some* of them ye shall kill and crucify; and *some* of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute *them* from city to city:

³⁵ That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

³⁶ Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

³⁷ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not!

³⁸ Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

³⁹ For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Micah 6:8

⁸ He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Mark 12:33

³³ And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love *his* neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

- 4 True religion must be consistent with the Word of God, Matthew 23:24-28;

Romans 2:1

¹ Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

James 3:10

¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

1 John 2:4

⁴ He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

- 5 Self-righteousness is an indication of inward corruption which will be brought to light in due time, Matthew 23:29-36;

Luke 11:39

³⁹ And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness.

2 Corinthians 10:12

¹² For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

Proverbs 30:12

¹² *There is* a generation *that are* pure in their own eyes, and *yet is* not washed from their filthiness.

IV The Last Call

- 1 Jesus showed His love and concern for the hardhearted inhabitants of Jerusalem, Matthew 23:37
- 2 Jesus departed from the wicked, but promised to return for the people who would welcome Him as Master, Matthew 23:38, 39;

Luke 12:40

⁴⁰ Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

Luke 21:27

²⁷ And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

John 14:3

³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.

Acts 1:11

¹¹ Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

NOTES:

Jesus' mission to this earth was the opening of the door to the Kingdom of Heaven. His message from the beginning of His ministry to the end of His life upon earth was the declaration of God's gift to the world and the price that had to be paid on Calvary for sin. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to

become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:11, 12). The scribes and Pharisees were among those who would not receive the Son of God.

Insufficiency of Pretense

Jesus repeatedly warned these groups of religious people that their codes and traditions would not earn for them an entrance into Heaven. The scribes and Pharisees had power among the people, and were respected by them. They ruled with rigor the religious affairs of Jerusalem. Jesus knew, however, that it would take more than the praise of man and a pretense of holiness to win for them the approbation of the Heavenly Father. These religious leaders seemed to think that they could deceive the infinite God, who knows the hearts of men, as they deceived finite man. But the Word declares, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Jesus still loved the souls of these people, and the reason that He spoke so strongly and so often against their sins was that they might see the error of their way and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Another reason for Jesus' wholehearted denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees was that others might see their error and avoid falling into the same mistake. Jesus said to the people, "I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). Knowing the power and influence that the scribes and Pharisees commanded, Jesus brought to light the grievous shortcomings of their doctrine to show clearly that theirs was not the true way into the Kingdom of Heaven. The Son of God knew that He would have to suffer death at the hands of the Jews, but He was fearless to declare the truth whatever the cost. The Gospel of Christ would be proclaimed more effectively today if His disciples had more of the courage of their Master. Paul tells us: "Let this mind be ! in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who . . . humbled himself, and became obedient unto death" (Philippians 2:5-8).

No Faith

It was not that these people were ignorant of the right way, for Jesus told the multitude and His disciples that the scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat. In other words, they were the people who studied the Law of Moses and proclaimed it to the religious gatherings. It would have been well with these people if they had really believed and put into practice the things they taught. "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?". (John 5:46, 47). The real trouble lay in the fact that these people did not believe the whole Word of God with all their hearts, nor did they put into daily practice the code of living that they professed. They expected other people to live up to the exacting standards of the Law, while they substituted traditions and ideals, thereby thinking to evade the weightier matters of the Law. Jesus said, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

The man most inexcusable in the sight of God is the man who condemns sin in the life of others but is tolerant of sin in his own life. "Thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" (Romans 2:3). The first fault that Jesus found with the scribes and Pharisees in this discourse with His disciples,

then, was that they told others what to do but did not do it themselves. There is much of this Pharisaical religion in the world yet today.

A True Concept

The second wrong that Jesus brought to light was the fact that the works of the scribes and Pharisees were done to be seen of men. A true concept of the Gospel is to do all things unto God. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23, 24). The scribes and Pharisees loved the praise of men and cared little for the praise of God. The end they sought was opposite from what it should have been. Had they been careful to gain God's approval upon their lives, they would not have needed the approval of men. The span of life on earth is very short. Its proper use is to glorify God and proclaim His love to the children of men, thereby winning converts for the K'ngdom of Heaven.

The Sin of Pride

The root of this reigning sin in the lives of the scribes and Pharisees, was pride. They loved the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues; they loved the greetings in the markets, and the titles bestowed by men. There was no sin in having the chief seat or in having important titles, but the sin was in the love for such things, the coveting after them, and the pride in them once they were attained. The scribes and Pharisees found to their sorrow that the Word of God is true. "The day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low" (Isaiah 2:12). Pride, which was the motivating factor in the lives of these self-righteous people, resulted! in physical destruction and eternal separation from God. Pride is just as deadly in our day as it was when Jesus lived upon earth. It can be seen in the lives of men on every hand, and it can be seen at times in the church. When a man goes to church to make a show of himself, his testimony, or his position, the displeasure of God is sure to fall upon him.

There are some, like the Pharisees, who cherish high titles; but Jesus revealed the misuse of certain authoritative titles. God is our Father and Christ is our Master. Jesus did not imply that honor, love, and respect should be withheld from those who are placed over us in the Gospel, but He did intend that men should remember that God is the author and the sustainer of our salvation. The only part that man has in salvation is to believe, receive, and to proclaim to others its infinite merits. The disciples of Christ are servants, and he who would be great among the disciples must be chief among those who serve. The great ministers in the Gospel today are those who serve the most. He who serves from his heart has dealt a stunning blow to pride.

Declarations Against Hypocrisy

Eight woes were levelled against the scribes and Pharisees in this chapter because they would not walk in the light that Jesus brought to the world and because they were hypocrites. This was not the first time that Jesus had spoken out against this sin, but here He was most emphatic because these people had not heeded His earlier warnings. Neither God the Father, nor the Son, speaks to men in tones of denunciation the first time He speaks. They speak in love and in mercy — "Come now, and let

us reason together."

Jesus had reasoned with these people many times, but now the Lord was taking His farewell, and He wanted them to be sure about their standing in the sight of God. The Truth will set all men free, if they hearken to it. When the Truth is proclaimed in its fullness and simplicity, men will have to give an account to God as to the disposition they make of that Truth. In one last effort, one might say, Jesus wielded the sword of Truth in the hope that it might expose the sin in the lives of these self-styled religious people and bring about a reformation in their lives. Christ's ministers often feel much the same burden about the people who come under their ministry, and they cry out against sin with all the energy at their command. Some people take exception to this type of ministry, but the proclamation of the Truth is necessary if men are to be liberated from sin.

Deflected Blessings

Jesus came to earth to bless the hearts of men; but if He finds it necessary to pronounce a woe upon a soul, there is a just cause. If the great Intercessor takes His stand against a soul, who or what can plead that soul's cause? Jesus told these people that through their hypocrisy and false leadership they were shutting up the Kingdom of Heaven against men — a very serious charge. They were the sworn enemies of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the only entrance into the Kingdom.

The active **opposition** of others is not all that keeps men out of the Kingdom of Heaven. Hypocrisy is a great stumbling block. People are watching those who profess to be Christians, and if they see a hypocrite, some lose faith. They place all religionists in the same category, and believe that because some have failed to measure their lives to the standard of the Word of God, it is not possible to do so. Thus the hypocrite is closing the Kingdom of Heaven to those who are watching his life.

In contrast, we see the light of the Gospel that shines from the one who is living a life wholly given to God. The joy and gladness that radiates from the true Christian is proof enough that the way into the Kingdom of Heaven is open to the "whosoever will."

The Lord's Farewell

Jesus knew that His words were falling upon the unheeding ears of the scribes and Pharisees. Soon the Son of God would be nailed to the cross, but He wanted the people of Jerusalem to know that to the last He carried a burden for their welfare. He would have gathered the hardened hearts of the Jewish people even in this last hour, but they would not listen to His last call. God's mercy is long-suffering, but if it is continually spurned it will at last be withdrawn. Jesus told the people that they had not recognized the time of their visitation; therefore their house was left unto them desolate. The Temple wherein they had displayed their pride and had made a show of their own traditions, the Temple that had been made a house of merchandise and a den of thieves, was deserted.

When the Son of God withdrew His presence from the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, the glory of God was withdrawn with Him. In a very few years both the city and Temple would lie in ruins. These people brought this misery upon their own heads because they rejected Jesus, the Savior. Rejection of the Son of God today will bring judgment to the individual heart and life. However, one ray of hope shone out

from the gathering darkness. Jesus promised to return for the people who would be waiting for Him and welcome Him. Some few men, even of Jerusalem, had received the Lord Jesus. The Master would not leave them without consolation — He would come back for them. This is the lively hope of the true Church today, and has been the hope of the Christians through the ages. Jesus is coming! How wonderful the hope!

QUESTIONS

- 1 Name one of Christ's chief objections to the religion of the scribes and Pharisees.
- 2 What gain did the scribes and Pharisees have in mind when they performed their religious works?
- 3 What must the attitude of the heart be, in order to do works that are acceptable unto God?
- 4 How may a man become great in the Kingdom of Heaven, according to Jesus' directions?
- 5 Name the first result of the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees.
- 6 How often in this chapter did Jesus cry out against hypocrisy?
- 7 How does God look upon hypocrisy today?
- 8 What result did the hardness of the hearts of the Jewish people bring upon that nation?
- 9 What great hope did Jesus leave with His disciples? Does that hope mean anything to the world today?