

- **\*READ Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8\*** In all three of these verses we find a single main theme concerning the character of our great Father in heaven and that theme is that He is gracious, compassionate, merciful, and overflowing in lovingkindness. May we ever be thankful that He truly is all of these things because we are a flawed people who sometimes are in such great need of these qualities within our own lives. Thankfully, God recognizes our weaknesses and seeks to aid us in our time of need, especially when we humble ourselves before Him. He will lift us up when we go to Him recognizing that He is truly our Father who loves us so. (**I Peter 5:6,7**)
- However, this does not mean that our God never reaches a point where He will hand down punishment and justice to those who sin and rebel against Him. We know this is for sure what will happen on the last day when *"God will bring every act to judgement, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil."* (**Ecclesiastes 12:14**), but we must also recognize that there are times within the Scriptures that God delivers immediate punishment towards those who sin. Adam and Eve come to mind. Cain comes to mind. The children of Israel often suffered immediate retribution for their sins. We can't escape the fiery justice of God.
- Thankfully, not all of God's anger is expressed through immediate corporal punishment. Sometimes, God is willing to simply rebuke or reprove those who are in sin in hopes that they repent and turn back to Him before it is too late. God the Father does this throughout the Bible, but we will also see this evening that Jesus was willing rebuke those who were caught up in sin. We will focus our time of study this evening on such an occasion as Jesus finds Himself face to face with some hypocrites who needed to be called out and put in their place. Let's open our Bibles to **Matthew 23** and consider this text and what Jesus says made these Scribes and Pharisees such hypocrites. Let's see just what made Jesus so angry with all of those who were supposed to be the leaders of Israel

## I. What made Jesus so angry with the Scribes & Pharisees?

### A. They dishonored Moses. (23:2)

1. Jesus begins by stating that *"the Scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses."* (**23:2**) He says this meaning that they had taken up the position of being the spiritual leaders of God's people. Just as Moses had been the one who had taught the Law and instructed the people in the ways of the Lord, these men had assumed that position within the nation of Israel during the days of Jesus and in many years years before that. The scribes were men who would study, transcribe, and even right commentaries on the Old Testament books. The Pharisees were their close comrades who were widely regarded as wise teachers of the Law.
2. Although they had these reputations of being wise and studious, Jesus uses this occasion to strongly rebuke and admonish them for dishonoring their position by being hypocrites posing as the godly leaders of Israel. Jesus goes straight into how exactly they dishonored Moses in the following verses starting in **verse 3**.

### B. They were hypocrites. (23:3,4,25-28)

1. Jesus begins by acknowledging that they were people who did in fact know the Law, and that the people would do well to listen and do what was told to them. However, His warning to the people was for them to beware of following the example of the Scribes and Pharisees for though they teach the right things they were failing to follow what they were teachings themselves. This, of course, is the very definition of hypocrisy.
2. Jesus in **verse 4** further expounds on what He says in **verse 3** by stating that they were tying heavy burdens upon the shoulders of the people, but they themselves were unwilling to practice what it was that they were preaching. They might have been preaching the need for holiness and righteousness before God, but they were very much failing to achieve that for themselves.

3. Jesus later on in the chapter speaks to this very thing in **verses 25-28**, when He describes the scribes and Pharisees as being like whitewashed tombs on the outside that appear beautiful and clean on the outside, but inside they are full of dead men's bones. This is to say that they were men who displayed outward godliness, but their inner man was spiritual dead and rotting. This is clearly seen to us in how they treated Jesus. They put on the facade of being those who cared greatly for God's people and will, but they inwardly hated Jesus for His popularity and influence. Jesus then goes on to speak of additional ungodliness on their part.

#### C. They were prideful & arrogant. (23:5-12)

1. Beginning in **verse 5**, Jesus sheds light on the prideful motivation that seemed to fuel the actions of the scribes and Pharisees. Instead of being a true humble servant of the people as was said about Moses in **Numbers 12:3**, these men did everything in an effort to be noticed by men. They did all sorts of things outwardly that would make themselves look more holy and righteous. They broadened their phylacteries and lengthened their tassels. They sought to sit in the seats where the important people sat at banquets. They expected for others to speak to them with respect in public places, even to be referred to as great teachers (Rabbi) by others. It seems they even invited others to refer to them as father or leader. (23:5-10)
2. Jesus doesn't beat around the bush at all when He is speaking of their shortcomings in this area. He plainly states that those who are great are those who seek to serve others just as Moses was a great humble servant to the people. While they sought to exalt themselves before the people, Jesus in this instance was humbling them through His speaking out against their actions. Surely, it makes complete sense that these people Jesus was rebuking would be the ones who lead the charge in having Him put to death.

#### D. They led others to not serve God as they ought to. (23:13-15)

1. While Moses was hard at work trying to get the people to turn to God in greater faithfulness, Jesus rebukes the scribes and Pharisees by stating that they were guiding of making the way to God more difficult than it needed to be. Jesus says that they were shutting up the kingdom of heaven from the people. This can be seen in the way they often opposed Jesus. The people looked to the Pharisees as the religious leaders, so if they opposed Jesus then the people might very well follow themselves in opposing Jesus and His teachings of the kingdom of heaven.
2. **Verse 15** speaks of the scribes and Pharisees' efforts in bringing proselytes into the people of God and how their efforts didn't actually create godly individuals, but instead it took them even farther away from God. How could such a thing be possible? How could the scribes and Pharisees get it all so wrong? I believe that Jesus answers these questions in the next section of rebukes towards the Pharisees.

#### E. They altered God's commands. (23:16-22)

1. Instead of keeping things simply as God tried to do for the people, the scribes and Pharisees were guilty of overcomplicating the commands and standards of God by creating their own set of commands and standards. They made proselytes twice the sons of hell because they were more worried about spreading their traditions in stead of the truth of God.
2. Jesus switches things up in **verses 16,17,19** by now referring to the scribes and Pharisees as "*blind guides*" and "*fools*" who tried to create new standards for what was binding when oaths were made and what was not binding. They sought to create differences between the temple and its gold and the altar and its offering. Jesus speaks out against this foolishness by stating that they are all one in the same, and what matters is simply keeping one's word. This is what God desires...a people who speak the truth no matter what, but the scribes and Pharisees sought to give people an out by putting more emphasis on some things over others.

## F. They were inconsistent in their following of God's will. (23:23,24)

1. Jesus neatly addresses the tribes and Pharisees problem of being inconsistent in how they approached and followed God's Word. Jesus specifically states how they would be extremely picky in their tithing of spices, and yet they would neglect those things that carried more weight such as being just, merciful, and faithful. Jesus puts it very well in **verse 24**, "*You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!*"
2. We'll notice, however, that Jesus doesn't say that they were wrong for paying attention to those thing they were to tithe. It wasn't about not doing those things, but it was about being balanced in their approach to obeying God's will. They were to give attention to the tithing while also paying attention to how they treated those around them. They were attentive to do those things that were quantifiable, but they weren't seeming to be transformed in their hearts to do all things rightly for the Lord.

## G. They followed in their father's footsteps. (23:29-35)

1. Jesus's final rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees centers around their hatred and mistreatment of those who had been sent by God to tell the people of their need to return to God in faithful obedience. The scribes and Pharisees acted as if they wanted to honor God's prophets and would never have joined their fathers in shedding the blood of the prophets (**23:29,30**), but Jesus states the they were guilty of doing the same thing.
2. Their ultimate reject of God would be in their rejection of Jesus who had come to spread the message of God's kingdom that was to be established through His work here on earth. Not only would they reject Jesus, but they would also reject the Apostles and others who would seek to spread the name and teachings of Jesus following His death and resurrection. (**23:34**) The scribes and Pharisees had given Jesus such a difficult time during His ministry, and it had come time for them to be put in their place. Jesus surely did that very thing during this time as He spoke before the people and His disciples.

## II. What lessons can we learn from these hypocrites?

### A. God holds those who claim to follow Him to a high standard.

1. If we are going to be a people who claim Jesus as our Lord then we must prepare ourselves to live up to a high standard. People who are striving to serve a holy and righteous God must themselves give every effort to be holy and righteous.
2. This is especially true if we are serving in positions of leadership among God's people. That was one reason why Jesus came down so hard on these groups of men. It was because they had sat themselves in a seat of leadership, yet they were not willing to put in the work to really be examples in those positions. We know that James says those who are teachers will be held to a stricter standard (**James 3:1**) which is precisely what we are seeing right now. The same thing can be true for leaders within the church who will be expected to give an account for the way they lead those put in their care. (**Hebrews 13:17**) I would even include parents and those who are in positions of influence. Each of us better give great effort to live up to God's high standard. This is especially true when it comes to our consistency of teaching and behavior.

### B. We better practice what we preach!

1. This is really what comes first and foremost to my mind when I think of the failings of the scribes and Pharisees. They simply weren't willing to do as they taught others to do. It is astounding how much of a following they had considering how they behaved in this way. Yet, we would do well to keep in mind that our inconsistency and hypocrisy will only harm our influence with others.
2. As Jesus said in **Matthew 7:1-5**, it can be extremely hard to help others get the speck out of their eye when we have a log sticking out of ours. People are very quick to spot a hypocrite, so therefore we must give very effort to make sure that we are consistent in practicing what we preach.

C. God desires humility from His people, especially leaders.

1. There was nothing wrong with the scribes and Pharisees seeking to teach others about the will of God and how they could be pleasing to him. However, the trouble comes with their motivation as is stated by Jesus in **Matthew 23:5**. They didn't do these things because they loved the Lord, but their motivation was in gaining for themselves notice and love from men.
2. That high standard that we must strive to live up to must be motivated by a love for God and the people who are around us...not so that we might gain attention for our godliness. If we are anything then we must give glory, honor, and praise to God for He is the one who has strengthened us to be what we are. I have a friend who always response to compliments by others by giving glory to God. What a great attitude to have in making sure that everything we do comes back to the goodness of God and what He has strengthened us to do. I am reminded of Paul's words in **Romans 11:33-36** as he considers the power and grace of God to give people the opportunity to be forgiven and put in a place where we can serve Him faithfully. *"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory [n]forever. Amen."* (**Romans 11:33-36**)

D. We must be consistent in our approach and application of God's commandments.

1. We might not be worried about tithing spices, but it is still a true temptation of Satan for us to get so focused on doing what is right that we forget why it is that we are doing it. We might not being doing it to receive man's glory, but we might get stuck in the mindset of doing the right thing simply so that we will be right. Our service to God isn't about being right, but it is about being obedient and glorifying a God that we love so much.
2. Therefore, we must be careful to make sure that our hearts are lined up rightly with our actions. We cannot allow ourselves to overemphasize either our heart or our actions. They most be balanced in the way we live. Everything that we do must be motivated by that love for God, and we must be sure to emphasize our trust in God's goodness and mercy just as much as we emphasize our need for obedience. If we truly believe that we have been saved by the grace and mercy of God then we must be willing to live like such a thing is true.
3. The opposite is true, as well. If we are going to live in an obedient way towards God then we must always remember that we are only able to do such a thing because of God's grace and mercy towards us. We are thing without God and we can do nothing without God. May we be balanced in our approach to our faiths and not fall into the traps that caused such great difficulties for the scribes and Pharisees.

I truly don't believe that Jesus took pleasure in so hotly rebuking the scribes and Pharisees. In fact, I would say that it was not enjoyable to rebuke those who were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of God's people. Nevertheless, it needed to be done, and it was recorded for us so that we might learn from their errors and not fall into the same temptations they found themselves succumbing to. May God help for us to remember their shortcomings so that we might avoid these failures and live lives that are only pleasing in the sight of God. May He help us to live to His high standard, be consistent, humble, and always striving to live out our faiths in all that we do.