

SITTING AT THE FEET OF JESUS

Warnings and Woes Matthew 23:1-39

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!" Matthew 23:13a**Day 1: Read Matthew 23:1-12.**

1. The phrase "in Moses' seat" (v. 2) refers to "the teaching authority...or those officially responsible for interpreting and applying the laws of Moses."¹
 - a. What is Jesus' evaluation of the teachers of the law and Pharisees as teaching authorities? (vv. 3b-4; 16a; 15:9)
 - b. Who is the true heir to the authority of Moses? (v. 10; Heb. 3:3-6)
2. What characterizes the teachers of the law and Pharisees? (vv. 3b-7) What characterizes the people of the kingdom of heaven? (vv. 11-12; * 5:3-10; 6:1-6, 16-18)
3. Consider the things the Pharisees love (vv. 5-7). How do you love modern versions of the same things?
4. The Pharisees and teachers clung not just to Old Testament law but also to an extensive oral tradition that heaped do's and don'ts on top of the original law.
 - a. What does Jesus say is the effect of adding on all these extra rules? (v. 4)
 - b. In contrast, what does Jesus offer? (11:28-30; * Gal. 5:1)

Day 2: Read Matthew 23:13-24.

5. Rather than welcoming the kingdom of heaven, how have the teachers of the law and Pharisees responded to it and to Jesus? (v. 13; 12:9-14; 12:22-24; 21:14-16a)
6. Jesus over and over condemns the teachers and Pharisees as hypocrites. (vv. 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29) What is at the root of their hypocrisy? (15:8-9)
7. How are the Pharisees completely off target in their teaching about oaths? (vv. 16-22) How did Jesus' teaching cut through such legalistic hair-splitting? (5:33-37)
8. The teachers of the law and Pharisees have become experts at keeping visible, measurable, external aspects of the law, like tithing herbs.
 - a. What "more important matters of the law" (v. 23b) have they neglected? (v. 23b; Mic. 6:6-8 * Isa. 1:13-17)
 - b. What picture in verse 24 shows the absurdity of their skewed view of the law?

* The  symbol identifies verses for further study.

¹France, R. T. *Matthew*: Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2007, p. 324)

Days 3 and 4: Read Matthew 23:13-36.

9. There was in fact some debate among Jews about how a cup should be washed to be ceremonially clean. But what deeper truth is Jesus getting at? (vv. 25-26, 28; see also 15:18-19.)
10. We too are tempted to make our outsides look "clean," no matter what the condition of our insides. How can you care for the condition of the inside of your cup? (Ps. 139:23-24; Rom. 12:1-3; Heb. 4:12)
11. How do the teachers of the law and Pharisees believe they are better than their forefathers? (v. 30)
12. Despite what the teachers and Pharisees may think about themselves, Jesus warns them that their generation will bear the guilt for "all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth...." (v. 35). Why will this guilt fall on them? (vv. 31-36; 27:20-26; * Compare 21:33-46.)
13. The problem with the Pharisees' thinking goes beyond making some mistakes in interpreting Scripture. R.T. France writes that the Pharisees "followed a system which tended to understand righteousness in terms of more and more minute legal prescriptions, and which could therefore dangerously distort the whole question of what it means to please God...." (p. 323).
 - a. What essential truths did these blind religious leaders fail to see and teach? (Ps. 51:15-17; 4:1-8)
 - b. What are some ways you catch yourself thinking like a Pharisee, forgetting that the basis for life in the kingdom of heaven is grace?

Day 5: Read Matthew 23:37-39.

14. What image of gentle protection does Jesus use here? To whom does Jesus compare himself in using this image? (Ruth 2:12; Ps. 91:1, 4)
15. The teachers and Pharisees and many of the people were "not willing" (v. 37) to receive Jesus as the promised Messiah and Savior. Where does such a refusal leave any who will not take shelter under Jesus' wings? (v. 33b; Heb. 2:2-3)
16. Take a moment for reflection. Thank God for the "great salvation" he has provided.