



Part 9 Intense Confrontation *Matt. 23*

Why does faith set some people free, but just seems to burden others? Why do some Christians seem happy while others just seem mean? Jesus diagnoses the problem.

"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So 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." Matt. 23:2,3 Four times Jesus says "beware the yeast of the Pharisees..."

I need to beware these four symptoms of a sick faith:

1. _____
"They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." Matt. 23:4
Contrast with Jesus: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matt. 11:28-30*
2. _____
"Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor... they love to be greeted... to have men call them 'Teacher!'" Matt. 23:5-7
Contrast with Jesus: See John 13:3-5
"...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... you appear to people as righteous but ...are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." Matt. 23:27
3. _____
"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...' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?" Matt. 23:16,17
Contrast with Jesus: See Luke 10:41,42

4. _____
"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 blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." Matt. 23:23,24
Contrast with Jesus: See Matt. 22:34-40
Cure for sick faith: _____ God's _____ ! (Lk 18:10-14)

Daily Meditations

Here's a chance to spend some time each day this week meditating on today's topic!
This week's memory verse: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matt. 11:28-30*

Monday

Read Matthew 23:1-4. Why do you think some people object to "organized religion"?

Do you think they would agree with Jesus' critique of religious leaders here?

How could you reach out to someone who has become embittered by religious hypocrites or empty religion?

Jesus says these people do not practice what they preach. In what areas have you been faking it -- not practicing what you preach?

Ask the Lord today to show you where you may be like the Pharisees in your own walk. Then bring Him those issues honestly, knowing He will help you by His grace.

Tuesday

Read Matt. 23:5-12. What temptations do you think are faced by people in positions of religious authority?

How do Jesus' comments address these temptations?

Read Matthew 6:1-8. How is this similar to the Matthew 23 passage?

Do you ever yield to the temptation to do things for show? How so?

In what ways do you sometimes practice your faith “to be seen by men”-- to get the applause and approval of others?

Why is “living for the applause” such a temptation for us?

Thank God that you do not have to be performance-oriented-- that He saves you by His grace, and not your merit!

Wednesday

Read Matt. 23:13-24. This is one of the most scathing things ever said by Jesus! How can you apply this to your own life-- What kinds of nit-picky religious rules and expectations can sometimes blind you to more serious sins?

How were they corrupting the practice of evangelism? (verse 15)

Of making promises with an oath? (verses 16-22)

Of tithing? (verse 23)

Are you sometimes guilty of corrupting these same practices? How?

How are you sometimes guilty of “straining a gnat but swallowing a camel”?

Ask God today to help you maintain the spirit of His principles, not just the letter of the law. Ask Him to show you where you strain at gnats. Thank Him for His grace-- that we are not saved through performance, as the Pharisees thought.

Thursday

Read Matt. 23:25-36. Again, this is a very direct rebuke of these Pharisees. Remember, Jesus is angry at the irony: The religious leaders of the people were actually the very ones leading them *away* from God. They were getting people so focused on rules and trivia that they were losing the forest for the trees. Do you sometimes “lose the forest for the trees” in your walk of faith? How?

How well does the inside of your cup match the outside? In what areas do you need to develop more integrity-- so that what people see on the outside matches the inside?

Ask God to help you develop integrity in your life!

Friday

Take this interesting challenge: It’s so easy to apply all of Matt. 23 to the Pharisees and dodge the bullet for ourselves. So read Matthew 23:1-28 again, only this time whenever Jesus says “teachers of the law and Pharisees”, instead substitute *your own name!* Before you read, ask God to speak to you through the passage. As you read, ask yourself which critiques-- which “woes”-- ring true for you. Which ones are areas you need to address? Write your observations here:

How would it look, in your life, for you to be more Christ-like in these areas?

Ask God in prayer to help you be more Christ-like and less Pharisee-like in the areas you noticed were most applicable to where you are now in your walk! And He will!

Saturday

Today please finish any meditations you might have missed, and please pray for the services this weekend. Pray also for the Easter services coming up soon-- and be praying about who you can invite! Thanks!! Keep asking Jesus to help you keep your faith uncomplicated, uncorrupted, and genuine!