

Episode #906 Matthew 23 Part 1-Outward Show of the Pharisees

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord was having a final, conclusive confrontation with the corrupt, religious leaders of Israel in Jerusalem. He was speaking to the multitudes and to His disciples, warning them of the hypocritical conduct of the scribes and Pharisees.

III. Burdens of the Pharisees. Matthew 23:1-12.

- A. Verse 5. Phylacteries are *phylakterion*, a guard-case, a safeguard. They read in the Old Testament about binding the Scriptures to the heart or mind in Deuteronomy 10:6. They would take this command literally by making little boxes that held small pieces of paper written with Scripture. That is not what God wanted, but for these passages to get inside the mind and heart. The Old Testament demanded that they make a border of blue around their garments, Numbers 15:37-41. But these had expanded it so much that it was a significant portion of the garment!
- B. Verse 6. “Love” is *philo*, friendship love or affection. They were affectionate toward these things. Upper rooms are chief or first rooms, Bullinger “first place.” To them, status was everything. Feasts are formal dinners, and not the religious festivals of the Israelites. The Lord told a parable warning against this way of doing things in Luke 14:7-11. Chief seats are *protokathedria*, the first or chief seats of authority.
- C. Verse 7. These are not just greeting but saluting in respect. Called is *kaleo*, meaning named or designated. “Rabbi” meant “My Teacher.” It was Jewish rabbis of this sort who had disciples who served and followed them.
- D. Verse 8. Teacher is *kathēgetes*, a different word from “rabbi.” This was a leader, guide, or director. He was a master-teacher, of which Christ was a prime example. Bullinger points out the modern texts read *didaskalos*, the usual word for “teacher.” The modern texts omit “the Christ” with the Syriac, but Scrivener thinks this is on insufficient authority. Those who had chosen Him as Master and were following Him as His disciples ought not to call anyone else “Master” while in sworn service to Him.
- E. Verse 9. The Father had to do with the creative source. This does not just have to do with the English word “father,” but with the full meaning of this word taken out of the Hebrew and the Greek. They could apply this word to no one but the Father Who is in the heavens.
- F. Verse 10. Teacher is *kathēgetes*, as in verse 8. These were commands to the crowds of Israelites and to His disciples. They lived in a day when Christ was literally present on earth, and one could own Him as your one and only Master and be taken by Him as a disciple. This is not the case today, and so we must use great care before applying this to ourselves.
- G. Verse 11. “Greatest” is actually “greater,” as in the “greater commandment” of chapter 22. Servant or minister is Greek *diakonos*, from which we get “deacon.”
- H. Verse 12. “Exalts” means lifts up on high, raises to dignity or honor. “Humbled” is made or brought low, or lowered in rank. This is an example of Hebrew poetic form in Greek, where two successive lines state two truths that are opposites. To humble oneself was the guarantee in the kingdom to come of exaltation.

IV. The Woes on the Scribes and Pharisees. Matthew 23:13-32.

A. Verse 13. “Woe” is the Greek *ouai*, sounding like wailing. He directs His words away from the multitude and disciples and right to the scribes and Pharisees. The Lord gives eight woes that correspond to the eight beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5. We will compare and contrast these as we go through this list of woes.

1. “Hypocrites” means actors or pretenders.
2. “Against men” or before men, as if shutting the gate in their faces.
3. Throughout the gospel period there were men who were taking a position from which they will enter the kingdom of heaven. The scribes and Pharisees not only did not take this place themselves, but they also were excluding others. Those who would enter in they were keeping out by their teachings.

V. Conclusion: The Lord accused the scribes and Pharisees of doing the works they did to be seen and praised by men. They loved honors and status, but the Lord warned His disciples not to even allow themselves to be called “Rabbi” or teacher, or to call anyone on earth “father.” The one greatest among them should be their servant, for the one who humbles himself will be exalted. Then, the Lord started a series of eight woes against the pretenders and actors, the scribes and Pharisees. Do we live in a straightforward and honest way? Or do we act hypocritically, like the proud religious leaders of the Lord’s day?