

Matthew 23
Part 1 (1-12)

Jesus' last public teaching, a castigation of the scribes and Pharisees

- I. Jesus addresses the multitude concerning the complete failure of the scribes and Pharisees (1-12).
 - A. Jesus points out their moral inconsistencies (1-4).
 1. Jesus' teaching was public and open for all (cf Mk 12:38) (cf 15:10; Mk 7:14).
 - a. This is not the way the religious leaders were conducting themselves (cf 12:14; 26:3, 4).
 - b. Often today religious error is taught privately before any open proclamation of the doctrine.
 2. "Moses' seat" indicated a position of authority (cf Neh 8:1; Jn 7:19).
 - a. These were the only religious leaders the people had.
 - b. What the Law of Moses required, that they had to do (cf Ex 18:19, 20; Deut 4:5; Rom 13:1).
 - (1) Lives, which do not correspond with their teachings, are not fit examples (cf Rom 2:21-23; 1 Cor 11:1; Gal 6:13).
 - (2) We should not be surprised that some evil men ended up in Moses' seat (cf Ps 12:8; Mk 14:63-65).
 - c. "Not ...one of their fingers" shows that they would not render help (cf Lk 10:30-32).
 - d. These "heavy burdens" were all the law (Acts 15:10) plus the traditions they had added.
 - (1) They imposed their own traditions under heavy penalties.
 - (2) They loved to show authority and exercise domination over God's heritage (cf 2 Cor 1:24; 1 Pet 5:3).
 - B. The pompous Pharisees were exposed (5-7).
 1. The works they did were done for show and recognition of men rather than in sincerity (cf 6:1,2; Jn 12:43).
 - a. "Phylacteries" were small leather pouches, which were designed to hold passages of scripture.
 - (1) These phylacteries were worn on the forehead and the left arm.
 - (2) These purely traditional pouches stemmed from an improper interpretation of several Old Testament passages (cf Ex 13:9,16; Deut 6:8; 11:18).

Note: Tradition placed the following four passages of scriptures in these phylacteries: Ex 13:3-10; 11-16; Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21
 - (3) The bigger they made them the more the people could see their phylacteries.
 - b. "Borders of their garments" were according to the law (cf Num 15:38, 39; Matt 9:21, 22).
 - (1) This was proper and correct but they made a show of it.
 - (2) Showy displays have never pleased God (cf Lk 20:47).

- c. The “uppermost rooms” were simply preferred places near the main person at the feast, i.e., the head table. The preeminent position (cf 20:20, 21; Mk 9:34; 3 Jn 9).
- d. The “chief seats” were the ones near the pulpit. Every one could see them.
- 2. They also delighted in formal public greetings.
 - a. There was nothing wrong in the name itself. Both Jesus and John the Baptizer were called Rabbi with no rebuke (cf Jn 1:49; 3:2, 26; 6:25; 20:16).
 - b. The desire for the attention of men made the calling of this name improper (cf 6:5, 6).
- C. Jesus tells His disciples not to get caught up in this showy display (8-12).
 - 1. The title of “Rabbi” was associated with pride and arrogance of those who wore it.
 - a. Mankind needs not to look for the glory of men (cf Acts 14:11-15; 1 Cor 3:5, 6).
 - b. Many today are like the men in these verses, e.g., wanting to be noticed and desiring the praise of others (cf 1 Thess 2:5, 6).
 - 2. Christ is the only “Master” (cf Jn 13:13, 14; Rom 14:9).
 - 3. “Father” has reference to a religious title (cf 6:8, 9, 32; 1 Jn 3:1).
 - a. This is a condemnation of religious titles (cf Acts 7:2; 22:1; 1 Cor 4:15).
 - b. Christians are equal in Christ. No preeminence (cf Eph 5:21; Phil 2:3) (Jn 1:27; Col 1:18).
 - 4. To be exalted we must humble ourselves before God (cf Prov 16:18, 19; 29:23; Dan 4:37; Matt 18:4).
 - a. One who uses any religious position to promote self certainly fits this category.
 - b. We need to constantly remind ourselves we are servants of God and man.