

Jesus Warns the Religious Leaders Matthew 23:1-36

by David Servant

Jesus warns the religious leaders of their hypocrisy and abuse of authority, and calls them to repentance.

Scripture: Matthew 23:8-33, Luke 11:37

Topics: "Hypocrisy", "Humility"

Description

David Servant preaches about the importance of avoiding hypocrisy in our lives, drawing parallels between the Pharisees of Jesus' time and modern Christian leaders. He emphasizes the need for both Christians and leaders to focus on God alone, avoiding titles and recognizing that all are equal in God's family. David encourages humility and servanthood among Christian leaders, reminding them to view themselves as servants rather than seeking titles or positions of authority.

Transcript

What we read today was certainly not the only time Jesus strongly rebuked the Pharisees and religious teachers. In fact, we've previously read in Luke's Gospel of a time when Jesus spoke some of the very same words while dining in a Pharisee's home (see Luke 11:37-52)! Because He was God, Jesus had every right to make such a critical judgment. Moreover, His criticism could be considered an act of love, because He was only telling them what they will hear Him say in the future when they stand before His throne of judgment. Jesus' warning was spoken when the religious leaders still had time to repent and be saved from their eternal fate in hell.

Just like the religious leaders of Jesus' day, modern Christian leaders also face the same temptations to abuse their authority. Because people often think more highly of Christian leaders than they should, these leaders are often tempted to take advantage of the people they lead. However, if Christians and their leaders will simply do what Jesus said, a problem that is widespread in the church will end.

The solution is two-fold. First, Christians should be careful how they view their leaders, respecting but not revering them. God is the only Person who should be revered. Too many Christians are focused more on human leaders than they are on God, giving them even more praise than God! Jesus said we should avoid using any titles when we speak of our leaders, such as "Teacher," "Father," or "Master," because we should consider God alone to be all of these to us.

Second, Christian leaders should be careful how they view themselves. They should not allow those they lead to give them titles, teaching their followers that, as Jesus said, we're all equal brothers and sisters in God's family. God should be the One we're focused on, not any man who has been gifted by God. Personally, I discourage people in the church I pastored from calling me "Pastor David" for the same reason I wouldn't allow them to call me "Teacher David," "Father David," or "Master David." God alone is our Shepherd, which is what the word pastor means. I wanted the people of my church to consider God to be their only Pastor and consider me to be only His servant. The word minister means "servant," and that is how all Christian leaders should view themselves, just as Jesus said in today's reading, "The greatest among you must be a servant" (Matthew 23:11). I told my congregation that if they wanted to attach a title to my name, they should call me "Slave Dave."

All of us, not just leaders, should monitor our own lives for hypocrisy. If our private lives are different than our public lives, if we preach what we don't practice ourselves, if we interpret or bend God's Word to fit our own lifestyles, if we emphasize what is minor and neglect what is most important, then we're hypocrites just like the Pharisees. Outwardly, they appeared holy and clean, but inwardly they were filthy, just like whitewashed tombs. Jesus called them blind guides, snakes, sons of vipers and sons of hell! We don't want to be one of them!

Q. Jesus promised the religious leaders that He would send them prophets, wise men and teachers whom they would persecute. How is this statement an indirect claim to His being God?

A. Only God sends prophets, so Jesus' claim that He would send prophets was a claim to be God.

Q. Kids sometimes make a promise to a friend, but because they had their fingers crossed behind their backs when they spoke, later claim that they don't have to keep their promise. How do you think God feels about that?

A. He would feel the same way about that as He did about the Pharisees claiming that they could break an oath if they swore "by God's Temple," but were obligated to keep an oath if they swore "by the gold in the Temple." Lying is lying.

Application: Today is a good time to examine ourselves. We all need to make sure our insides---our motives, thoughts and desires---are just as clean as our outsides. Why not ask the Lord to show you if you are in any way guilty of an inward sin so you can purify yourself from it?

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