

Matthew 23:1-12 “The Danger of Spiritual Fakes”

2.18.18

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 23, verse 1.

As you are turning in your Bibles, I want to show you something and ask you what I’m doing. It’s basketball season and if I’ve been passed the ball and I do this, like this young man



what do you call that? A FAKE, right? #32 was faked out. He took the fake. What’s a fake for? The goal is to get the other team to take the fake so that you can score right? You hope they take the fake. Let me show you some fakes...



...Who are they? The Pharisees and Scribes of Jerusalem... And who have than been faking?



The people. They have been teaching FALSE or FAKE doctrine and Jesus has been telling the people “Don’t fall for it! Don’t jump! Don’t take the fake!”

It’s Tuesday in Jerusalem, the last week of Jesus’ life before He’ll be crucified 3 DAYS LATER and then rise from the dead. He’s been teaching in the Temple Courtyard and He’s been like a coach trying to get the team to understand the tactics of the opposing team. Problem is...what Jesus has been doing has been

inciting the opposing team, in this case the PHARISEES, to not just beat Him in a game of wits...but, now they are plotting to kill Him.

Jesus has exposed these men (see them again)...



...the religious leaders of the people as FAKES and what we're going to see this morning is where Jesus drops the hammer on these men, right in front of the people gathered in that courtyard. He's going to pull no punches... Follow along with me...

Matthew 23:1-12

¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, ³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. ⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. ¹⁰ Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. ¹¹ The greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

The title of this morning's message is: **"The Danger of Spiritual Fakes."** As we go through the message today, we're going to see 5 characteristics of spiritual fakes. I'm going to show them to you now...

5 Characteristics of Spiritual Fakes

1. Claim ultimate authority
 2. Hypocrites: saying one thing and doing another
 3. Burden people
 4. Want to be seen
 5. Want to make a name for themselves
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Jesus is going to blast these fakes, these Pharisees in this his last public sermon before His death on the cross. Look at verse 1 again...

Matthew 23:1

¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,

Jesus is once again exposing these guys publicly in the Temple courtyard! The tension in that courtyard had to be unbelievable. This is a scathing denunciation by Jesus. Jesus has systematically destroyed their authority and credibility right in front of the very people they lead. And so, the Pharisees are incensed with

hatred for Jesus that they would have probably killed Him on the spot, but they knew many of the people actually believed He was the Messiah, so they were afraid of Him.

Jesus, here, is almost like an attorney giving His CLOSING ARGUMENTS in a courtroom, and His argument include these five characteristics of a spiritual fake. Let's look at the first one...

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Matthew 23:2-3a

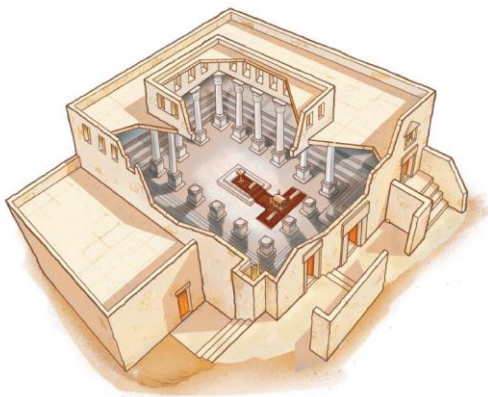
²"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat,³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do.

Now, let me as you a question: As Jesus is teaching the crowds...does He name the Scribes and Pharisees? Do you think He swept His arm in front of that bunch of snakes?



I believe Jesus was presenting them to the people like Vanna White turns a letter on "Wheel of Fortune." And Jesus begins noting to the people what a spiritual fake looks like...

What does a spiritual fake look like: Well, Jesus said that they want to sit in Moses's seat. You say, "What does that mean?" Well, they claimed ultimate authority. That's what the seat of Moses was. Take a look at this picture of a first century synagogue...



See that burgundy area down front and that little covered seat on the raised platform? That's the "Seat of Moses" and that's the special seat where the leading Scribe or visiting Pharisee would sit. Here's an artist's depiction of that...



You see the word Pharisee literally means: "separated one." They would not seat with the people. They were too good for that. They would sit in the place of authority and they claimed ultimate authority and you didn't question them. If you did, they'd shut you down in a heartbeat. By the way, this seat or chair, is where our universities get the term, "Chair of a Department." It's the highest authority in that department: for example, the Chair of the English Department.

Let me show you a modern-day example of a person who sits in a seat of authority...this lady...



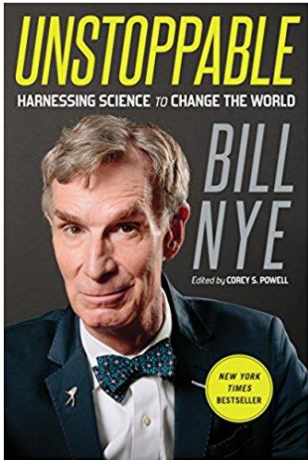
that's Joy Behar of "The View," the daily ABC talk show. Behar sits in the middle:



...She sits in the Modern-Day "seat of authority" ...espousing and pontificating her "authority" five days a week to the American public...

You say, "Wait a minute...she's not a spiritual authority." Oh yes she is. She said earlier this week that anyone who talks to Jesus has "mental illness." That's what she said about VP Mike Pence last week. He said that he prays in the mornings and talks to Jesus and she said, that's "mental illness." In other words, she's claiming spiritual authority over Christians. Do you see...

Here's another example of a man who "sits in the modern day seat of Moses." Do you know him?



That's Bill Nye the "Science Guy," even though he doesn't have a science degree. He only has a Mechanical Engineering degree. Yet, time and time again, Bill Nye is brought on National Television...



as an expert on scientific issues. And amazingly Bill Nye views himself as being qualified to come on such shows! But Bill Nye has no scientific credentials whatsoever, in my opinion he's nothing more than a comedian in a lab coat, and has never contributed any research to the scientific community! And yet, he claims authority.

In fact, Bill Nye says that if you teach your children from the Bible, that God created the heavens and the earth in 6 literal days, you are guilty of "child abuse." Did you know that? That's right. Bill Nye says, if you teach anything but Evolution to your children, you are a child abuser. How 'bout that!

You see, Bill Nye is religious... What religion? Science. He worships the religion of Evolutionary Science. He has placed his full trust and faith in what man says about the universe, instead of God. He claims to be the MORAL one by saying we are hurting our children. He even advocates locking up parents who teach their children anything but Evolution. And you see, that's why Nye and Behar can be described as **"spiritual/religious," because they claim the moral high ground.**

Listen carefully please, this is so important. Today you can not question the modern-day Pharisees about science, about gender, about sexuality, about the origins of life, about baby's in mother's wombs, about the climate, about guns, about education, about politics... No sir, because if you do, if you question their position, their authority, their narrative...their talking points, their skewed data and statistics...then, they'll tell you that you're uneducated, you're close-minded, you're bigoted, you're unloving, intolerant and well... "mentally ill" or a "child abuser." Yes, they sit in the seat of authority, and you ought to be thankful, you can even be in their presence.

I want to tell you something this morning, listen carefully Church family, (and we'll talk more about this next week when Jesus levies His 7 WOES on these guys) but for now...understand this... We can not let ourselves be intimidated by the Joy Behar's and the Bill Nye's and the Al Gore's and the Chuck Schumer's and the Planned Parenthood's and the CNN's and the progressive liberal professors of our universities...of our day!!

Oh, they'll tell you that they know what's best for you and for me and for our families and even this country...and if you so happen to disagree with them...oh yes...they'll tell you to shut your mouth. And they'll try to shut you down by calling you names. They'll tell you the science is settled, they'll tell that you're on the wrong side of history... Oh...but, all they're doing is seeking to intimidate you, just like the Pharisees tried to do Jesus when they said that His miracles were of Satan...and you know what... He didn't stand for it... Remember...He shut them up...He silenced them...they were gagged and by the time Jesus was done with them, they dared not ask Him another question.

You see, these fakes of our day, AND Jesus' day are nothing more than ideologues who twist the truth to fit their agenda. Beware! That's what Jesus was saying... See it again...

Matthew 23:2-3

²"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, ³so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.

OH..."They preach, but do not practice." See the list of again...

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You know Jesus said, "If they tell you something that is truth...then do it." In other words, from time to time, Jesus was saying, the Pharisees might stumble across the truth...like a stopped watch is right twice a day...and when they tell you the truth...do it. But, don't do as they do. Why? Because they're fakes! They say one thing and do another.

You see, they couldn't live what they were teaching? Why? Because they don't have the ability to overcome their own pride, desire for pleasure and power and prestige. Oh yes, they promote their ideas as outwardly moral and outwardly ethical and it looks okay on the outside. They might even talk about God. They might even talk about love and they seem...well... really nice. And yet, often times with these folks...the cold hard truth is that they aren't able to follow through with what they're asking others to do because they don't have the internal power to do it. You want to know why? Because it's of the flesh...they're carnal, they're of this world system.

Honestly, the people who drive me the craziest who fit in this group...are the wealthy TV evangelists, who tell us to give to their ministries so they can help the poor, feed the hungry and give water to thirsty: and yet, they fly around in \$40 million jets. Give me a break! **Look at #3.**

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Matthew 23:4

4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

What are these "heavy burdens" Jesus is talking about? Well, it was their system of 613 laws, 365 negative and 248 positive. In essence, they had a law for everything and they heaped these ridiculous laws onto the people. For instance, they said on the Sabbath, you could cut a melon in half, but not in quarters, because that would have been considered "work" and breaking the Sabbath. Isn't that ridiculous!

You see, according to one commentary I read, the Pharisees came up with all of these additional rules because they intended to "make the OT relevant to current life situations."

That sounds like the transgender debate and the gay marriage debate... And that's what the mainline Protestant denominations are doing. They say: "Let's just make the Bible relevant to today's culture. Let's upgrade it to fit the societal norms." No! You and I don't get to change the commands of God, because they're the commands of God and God is not dumb, His Word is timeless AND, when He THEONEUSTOS His word (breathed it) into man...we're blessed to have a guide to live our lives for all time's sake!

Listen, God and His Word is the same yesterday, today and forever and the Bible is just as applicable for us today as it was when it was written. No!! God is not dumb and He and His Word stand outside of time. The Bible is timeless and it needs no updating! It's us who need the updating and it's the timeless Word of God that can do that work! **Look at the 4th Characteristic:**

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In other words, it's all about them. Watch what Jesus said...

Matthew 23:5-6

5 They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, 6 and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues

Do you remember this picture from earlier...



Do you know what that is on the guy's head in the middle? That's a phylactery. Here's a close up image of one...



Phylacteries were a small cube-shaped case, made of leather, containing Scripture passages written on parchment. They were worn on the forehead or left arm as a literal way to obey the OT admonition from...

Deuteronomy 11:18

18 "You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes."

Now, did the Lord mean for us to wear a Bible between our eyes, or did He mean for us to read the Bible and that it might guide our eyes, how we live and how we act? Yeah, it's the latter, not the former. But those guys wore those things and they lengthened the fringes or "tassels" on their robes... Like this...



Tassels

The tassels of the garment were often woven with a blue chord (which represented heaven to the Jew) and there were four of them on each corner of the garment, which was to remind the people to obey God's commands and to be holy. But you see...they took these reminders from Scripture and perverted them by exaggerating them, so that they would be seen by others.

Oh, it's so easy to do this. Do what? Make ourselves look good. We want people to think we've got all together don't we? That everything in our family is just perfect...we've got everything down to a "T." And we let everybody on Facebook know about it. And we hope we'll get a bunch of "Likes." Or maybe we'll say something profound enough that we'll get retweeted on Twitter! I'm the **Chief of sinners, here!**

Have you asked yourself lately, when you're posting something on social media, "Why I am doing this?" Is it for me? Just to make me look good? To justify what I'm doing? To be seen by others? Do we ever ask: "What impact will this have on the Lord?" Remember, we are to wear His robe and be His representative, His billboard, in all we do. Will it bring Him glory, or just me? And this ties right in to **characteristic number 5.**

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You know so much of this life, particularly here in 21st Century America, is about our pleasure and our comfort, wanting to make a name for ourselves... It's really hard to think about the glory of God and His kingdom in this "me-saturated" culture isn't it? We're driven by the marketers to think about ourselves, right? They say, "Go ahead...you deserve it. You deserve the best." It's become so much about bringing myself comfort and ease that it truly is hard to not think about myself.

Truly, so much of what we do is centered around making "ME" happy. And so much of that "happiness" seems to be derived from what others think and say about us. And so we do what we do, wear what we wear, drive what we drive and even use the pictures we use on social media, so that others might see us and we might make a name for ourselves. Oh, might we care more about what Jesus thinks than

somebody on Twitter? Might we care more about eternal matters than fleeting moments of pleasure here on this earth?

Jesus said:

Matthew 23:5-10

⁵They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. ⁸But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. ¹⁰Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.

Now do misunderstand, Jesus wasn't saying that we couldn't call our dad's "Fathers." That's ridiculous. No. He was saying the only "Master" and "Father" of our lives is to be God. It's why I believe the Roman Catholic Church has gotten this wrong, by calling their priests, "Father" and calling the Pope, "Holy Father." Only God is to be called "Father" in that way. In other words, He is the authority, not man!

And that's the point. Remember from verse 1, remember who Jesus was teaching?

Matthew 23:1

¹Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,

His disciples... He was saying, you have one instructor and that's me! And then He brought it all together by saying this...

Matthew 23:11-12

¹¹The greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹²Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

The Pharisees always exalted themselves in everything they did. There was no humility found in them anywhere. Would Jesus embody these words? He would He be humble? You bet He would! In just two nights, He would take a towel and a basin and humble Himself and wash their feet and the next morning, He would humble Himself to die on the cross.

So, what's the lesson for today? Simple. If we exalt ourselves, like the Pharisees, God will humble us. It's LAW TO THE PROUD, GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. That's how Jesus always did it. Jesus always honored the humble, but blasted the "prideful" and the "puffed up."

Psalms 31:23

Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride.

Matthew Henry said, ***"Honor is like a shadow which flees from those who pursue it, but follows those that flee from it."***

What are the characteristics of a Spiritual Fakes, characteristics of the Modern-Day Pharisees of our Day:

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May we not be spiritual fakes! Might we, be like our Master, the Lord Jesus. Might we humble ourselves? Might we be like John the Baptist who said, "He must increase and I must decrease." Might we NOT want to make a name for ourselves, but a name for Him. Might we look to Jesus and cry out to Him and say, "Lord I need you! Please help me serve to you and not myself!"
