

Sunday, October 5, 2025

Matthew 23:1-12 SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

Matthew 23:1-12

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 2 "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. 5 "Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be 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 do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

1. Introduction:

- What is going on? We are in Jesus' last sermon just outside Jerusalem before he gets arrested.
- To whom is it? It is a message to the Crowds and to his disciples.
- What is the theme? A warning about spiritual leaders. A warning meant to challenge us.
- Who are you letting speak into your life? Who are you watching and following?

Two questions to be answered today:

- What should I look for in a spiritual leader?
- How to be a spiritual leader?

In today's passage there are 4 themes you can observe regarding what makes a spiritual leader:

- Spiritual Authority
- Integrity

- Compassion
- Humility

2. **Spiritual leaders have Spiritual authority.**

2 "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 So you must be careful to do everything they tell you.

In the synagogues there was a large stone seat, Moses' seat. If you had the seat of Moses in your synagogue, you were the chief teacher, you occupied a position of authority. Jesus acknowledges their authority in verse three (3).

To what standard are we using today for someone to "occupy a teaching role?" Subscriber count on social media does not legitimize false teaching. The danger of this is greater with social media, influencer culture, people who want their voices heard, but do not model it in their life. People who broadcast their opinion but do nothing to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Just because someone speaks some truth that does not mean they have authority over you.

False preaching often has strains of truth in it.

3. **Spiritual leaders have Integrity.**

Verse 3 But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders,

Do not be someone that posts truth and not live it! Pharisee's prioritized adherence to Mosaic Law. Knowing the law is different from letting the bible change our lives. God's word is already established. Truth has been set! Jesus points out in our passage "they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." THEY BEAR NO FRUIT! They had no integrity.

4. **Spiritual leaders have compassion.**

4 They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

Pharisee's, "won't lift a finger" to help. Akin to a leader, a shepherd that sees the plight of the city they are serving and does nothing to help it. Do we pray for us to see our neighborhood, our work as a mission field, do we lift our fingers to help? We should want a shepherd that is going to fight, pray, have grace and not just throw more laws at us.

Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus is giving a warning. We do not need more doctrine, rules, theology. God does not need your striving he needs your surrender. The Bible is not to bind you, but you set you free.

John 8:31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

You are loved!

5. Spiritual leaders have humility.

5 "Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be 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 do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

This message is not to the Pharisees, it is to the disciples and the crowds. He is telling them, and us, what to look for.

1 Samuel 16:7 ... The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

At some point, rebuke, is loving. To not acknowledge truth, to not acknowledge the Bible as God's will for our life is wrong. Conviction is a gift. God is not just after right actions he is after a right heart. The right heart produces fruit.

Russel Brand, after being called out for his selfishness, said "... You know...like most addicts I'm pretty self-obsessed. The journey of faith for me has been about

altering the monologue of my internal life. It's sort of a dialogue, you know when I'm speaking to myself, 'you shouldn't have done that, you've said that, I wonder if that's going to happen.' Like a dialogue but both voices are me. But it's becoming a dialogue between me and you'll know it as a Christian, Christ, I feel him, I hear him within me. And my hope is, that it'll will eventually become a monologue again and it will just be him. He must become greater I must become lesser. "

Our heart changes as we see him as we relearn his love for us daily. Our walk changes, our fruit changes, our witness changes.

1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Rebuke is for the people that proclaim the kingdom of God. God is the ultimate judge and hands down the verdict and very real consequences. Quit trying to humble others and humble yourself! "The sin we should hate most in the world is our own."

6. Who are we letting speak into our lives?

Are their actions demonstrating a life of reverence for Christ? We need to be careful what we are taking in.

Matthew 6:1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. 2 "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Philippians 1:15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Your job is to look for fruit. Who are we looking to? There are a lot of people that walk around touting the label, Christian. If the enemy is allowing “bad” Christians to get the spotlight, it is time for you to lift a finger! Make your faith your own.

Consider your spiritual leaders carefully while you prayerfully become one that has:

- God-given authority
- Integrity
- Compassion
- Humility
- Someone to lead you in the ways you should go.

QUESTIONS:

1. Who is the wisest person you know? What makes them wise? In what ways are they wise?

2. Has anyone served as a role model for humility in your life? Who and how? What are some practical ways we can value others over ourselves and practice humility in our daily life?

3. How do people, including church members and attendees, sometimes fake Christian life? Define hypocrisy. In what ways have you failed to practice what you preach? Even for unbelievers, hypocrisy is despised. Why do you think this is? Why is it not enough simply to be sincere in what you believe? How does this passage serve as a warning in this regard?

4. Do you let just anyone speak into your life? What does that even mean? How do you handle that? What point(s) from the sermon will you remember most?