

Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 23:16-22 | Blind Guides, Fools, and People
Sunday October 19, 2025

WELCOME:

- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- My sermon notes are in the foyer—please take them home with you.

REVIEW:

Last Sunday, we talked about one of the most dangerous things anyone can ever do—stand in the way of someone's faith.

We learned how the false teachers of the day—the scribes and Pharisees—slammed Heaven's door in people's faces.

Rather than encouraging people to know and believe the truth, they placed themselves as roadblocks between people and Heaven.

They did so by:

- Teaching man-made traditions instead of expositing God's truth.
- Threatened people.
- Religious bullies.

We have discussed many things that we have learned from the scribes and Pharisees, most of them what not to do.

Application
KEY QUESTION:

- *Are you making your relationship with God more difficult than it really needs to be?*
- *Are you making it more difficult for others?*

It seems that people who make their walk with the Lord difficult really don't understand what they're talking about.

So what they say they believe.

What's tragic is that many times, they're teaching those things that they don't understand to others—just like the scribes and Pharisees.

KEY QUESTION:

Are we drawing people to the true message of the Gospel or converting them to something else?

Are we modeling and teaching what Christ modeled and taught?

Or are we modeling and teaching what we think Christ modeled and taught?

Those are good questions to ponder.

Our behavior, character, and speech either draw people toward Christ or away from Him.

Churches do the same thing.

I made distinctions between the different churches throughout the VV.

I also categorized churches and teachers into specific groups: Distracted Churches, False Churches, True Churches, Heretics, and False Teachers.

I provided a framework that guides you through identifying red flags and green flags regarding true teachers and false churches.

Lastly, what to do when you find a true Church—a healthy church.

That's all, a review from last Sunday.

INTRODUCTION:

Today, we continue our study of Jesus' last public sermon.

Wes - First point to the Crucifixion

It's a sermon to the nation of Israel, but it's about their religious leaders.

Jesus exposes these proud scribes and Pharisees for who they truly are—false teachers and hypocrites.

That's not a good foundation, is it?

These men have proved themselves untrustworthy.

Today, Jesus will expose their untrustworthiness through promises, vows, and oaths.

These men are not men of their word.

In other words, Jesus exposes them as liars.

Jesus spends a lot of time addressing lies and liars through the topic of promises, vows, and oaths.

Why does Jesus spend so much time in his last public sermon here?

Because there is a much bigger reason—the promises, vows, and oaths reveal a moral condition of our hearts that points to something greater.

What is it? Let's find out!

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 23:16—"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever takes an oath by the temple, it means nothing. But whoever takes an oath by the gold of the temple is bound by his oath.'

Matthew 23:17—Blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?

Matthew 23:18—Also, 'Whoever takes an oath by the altar, it means nothing; but whoever takes an oath by the gift that is on it is bound by his oath.'

Matthew 23:19—Blind people! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

Matthew 23:20—Therefore, the one who takes an oath by the altar takes an oath by it and by everything on it.

Matthew 23:21—The one who takes an oath by the temple takes an oath by it and by him who dwells in it.

Matthew 23:22—And the one who takes an oath by heaven takes an oath by God's throne and by him who sits on it.

These are the holy words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, infallible, sufficient, and efficacious Word of Almighty God.

PRAY:

The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. (Psalm 146:8)

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 23:16—"Woe to you,

Woe to you—A woe is a warning and a rebuke. — *scolding ; reprimand*.

Think of it as a curse.

Jesus blessed the nation of Israel in the Sermon on the Mount.

Now three years later, because of their hard hearts, anger, pride, and their lack of repentance—Jesus curses and condemns Israel's leaders.

They are guilty.

A “woe” ^{denounces} condemns evil and, at the same time, ^{laments} laments it.

Many people claim that Jesus is unnecessarily harsh.

Jesus did the very same thing and used the same terminology that we saw the OT prophets use ...Isaiah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah.

The Hebrew version of “woe” is 'ôy.

The Greek version of “woe” is οὐαί. (Ew-eh!)

So we go from 'ôy to οὐαί.

It doesn't even sound like a word.

Think of it more as a painful cry that comes from your gut.

Whether we look at the Hebrew or Greek version, we need a half dozen English terms to grasp its meaning.

It's a sound that mixes grief, despair, sorrow, dissatisfaction, pain, and the ^{fact} threat of losing your life.

It's used in the New Testament for sorrow and judgment, punishment and pity, as well as cursing and compassion.

It's so hard to put it into actual words.

Matthew 23:16—“Woe to you, blind guides,

Jesus refers to the scribes and Pharisees as *blind* three times: "blind guides," "blind fools," and "blind people."

Let's focus first on blindness.

Physical Blindness—the inability to see.

The OT demanded special consideration for people who were blind.

It also punished people who misled or took advantage of someone who was blind.

+ **Leviticus 19:14**—Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but you are to fear your God; I am the Lord.

+ **Deuteronomy 27:18**— 'The one who leads a blind person astray on the road is cursed.'

(ILLUSTRATION)

God doesn't think that insulting or taking advantage of a disabled person is funny—it's wicked—and there is a price to pay for it.

In the OT, we see that physical blindness can come from sin and disobedience.

My first example comes from King Zedekiah.

The context is that King Zedekiah rebelled against God and refused to lead the nation of Israel.

So God sent a Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, to punish Zedekiah and the entire nation.

2 Kings 25:7—(The Babylonians) slaughtered Zedekiah's sons before his eyes. Finally, the king of Babylon blinded Zedekiah, bound him in bronze chains, and took him to Babylon.

In other words, God sent the Babylonians to take Israel into captivity.

The last thing that King Zedekiah saw before he was blinded was his children being murdered.

Samson also lost his sight due to his sin of disobedience.

Judges 16:21—The Philistines seized (Samson) and gouged out his eyes.

In the NT, blindness was tragically common.

Poor hygiene and unsanitary living conditions were a major part of the problem. Newborn babies were especially susceptible to blindness.

There are a lot of blind people in the Gospels—and if someone is blind, that means they can't work and usually have to beg to stay alive.

John 9:1—As (Jesus) was passing by, he saw a man blind from birth.

John 9:2—His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

John 9:3—"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him."

In other words, God ordained/predestined this man's blindness from birth so that the blindness would bring God glory.

Keep in mind, this is no accident.

Jesus and the Disciples didn't just stumble upon this blind man on some random day.

It was all ordained by the Father. Why?

The prophets of the OT prophesied about God's Savior healing the blind.

+ **Isaiah 29:18**—On that day the deaf will hear the words of a document (hear the words read from a book), and out of a deep darkness the eyes of the blind will see. — *praise!*

+ **Isaiah 42:6 NLT**—"I, the Lord, have called you (Jesus) to demonstrate my righteousness. I will take you by the hand and guard you, and I will give you to my people, Israel, as a symbol of my covenant with them. And you will be a light to guide the nations.

+ **Isaiah 42:7 NLT**—You will open the eyes of the blind.

Healing the blind is a unique miracle.

No OT prophet healed someone's eyesight.

Healing the blind is known as a "messianic miracle."

Meaning that blindness is only healed by the Lord Jesus—the Messiah Himself/the Savior.

So Jesus fulfilled OT prophecy *by the blind* of healing many times throughout the Gospels.

In fact, in a sermon to his hometown friends in Nazareth, he proclaimed:

**Luke 4:18—The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
~~that the oppressed will be set free,~~**

- Jesus healed two blind men in Galilee (Matt. 9:27–30),
- A blind man in Bethsaida (Mk 8:22–26),
- A blind beggar named Bartimaeus and his friend at Jericho (Mt 20:30–34).

Jesus' illustration of blindness is much more familiar to his first-century audience than to us today.

We also see the Lord using blindness after His resurrection.

The apostle Paul was blinded at his conversion and was miraculously healed through Ananias (Acts 9:1).

Paul later commanded that a sorcerer, Elymas, be temporarily blinded (Acts 13:11).

EL-ih-mass

But ~~the~~ the false Teachers are not only blind...

Matthew 23:16—"Woe to you, blind guides,

Not only do we see physical blindness as a problem in Scripture, but spiritual blindness is a much bigger problem.

Jesus moves us from the physical to the spiritual—the kingdom of this world to the Kingdom of God.

Jesus proclaims a curse on the scribes and Pharisees because they are not only spiritually blind—they considered themselves *guides, mentors, and leaders* to others.

Remember how the Pharisees ordained themselves? There are consequences when people pretend to be something they are not.

Today it's like going on the internet & downloading a fake ordination certificate from a false church.

Moral and spiritual blindness has more consequences than physical blindness.

Matthew 5:29—If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Jesus uses hyperbole—taking His illustration to the extreme to make His point.

These pastors, priests, and ministers of the day—the scribes and Pharisees—may have 20/20 vision—but they can't see the truth.

And they can't see the truth because their religious pride blinds them.

In fact, many of the physically blind people that Jesus healed in the Gospels had more spiritual insight than the religious leaders (Matt. 20:30).

Disclaimer:

↳ Bartimaeus

Jesus isn't intentionally being insensitive to those who are blind—he's using blindness as an illustration.

It's common sense that when you travel to the Grand Canyon, you are going to choose a guide who can physically see the Grand Canyon.

Eyesight is of utmost importance—yet Jesus has warned the people about the scribes and Pharisees before...

Matthew 15:14—Leave them alone! They are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both will fall into a pit."

How important is it to see where you are going while hiking the Grand Canyon?

Is it a matter of life or death?

It's also a matter of eternal life and eternal death from your pastors, priests, and ministers today.

Jesus chooses His words with divine precision. Here's why:

The Pharisees had long considered themselves as guides to the blind, lights to those in darkness, correctors of the foolish, and teachers of the immature (Rom. 2:19–20; cf. 3:2).

However, if the pastors, priests, and ministers don't know where they're going spiritually, why would people follow them?

Matthew 23:16—“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever takes an oath by the temple, it means nothing. But whoever takes an oath by the gold of the temple is bound by his oath.’

Jesus refers to a false teaching from the false teachers regarding promises, vows, and oaths.

Whatever the terminology, the big picture here is how the scribes and Pharisees taught the nation how to lie to people and deceive God.

They ultimately trained them to use loopholes to break their word.

We do the same thing today.

The reason the world needs attorneys is because of mankind's reputation for not doing what we say we're going to do.

Hosea 10:4—They speak mere words, taking false oaths while making covenants. So lawsuits break out like poisonous weeds...

It's why there is so much paperwork involved in buying a car or a house.

- What happened to a handshake being as good as a man's word?
- A man's word is his bond?
- His word is as good as gold.

- A gentleman's agreement.

Tragically, mankind doesn't do well at keeping promises—and if someone is not going to keep his word in the little things, he won't do it with the big things either.

↳ Grandparents

Matthew 23:16—'Whoever takes an oath by the temple, it means nothing. But whoever takes an oath by the gold of the temple is bound by his oath.'

↳ This is what the scribes & phar. say.

The first time the word "oath" appears is in Genesis 14.

Genesis 14:22—But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand in an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth,

The Hebrew word for 'oath' comes from the number seven.

In Genesis 21, Abraham gave King Abimelech a gift of seven lambs to establish a covenant over water rights.

Typically, covenants are not made by people but by God.

KEYPOINT 1:

Covenants are relationships that God establishes with His chosen people based on His promises.

In other words, God has made several covenants with mankind:

- Noahic Covenant—never to flood the earth again
- Abrahamic Covenant—that the Messiah would come from Abraham's family.
- Mosaic Covenant—God's laws were instituted under Moses
- Davidic Covenant—that the Messiah would reign as king from David's family
- New Covenant—based on the grace of Christ Himself

Testament

Here's the thing—God made those promises to His people based upon His own name.

God is both the Promiser and the Guarantor.

- Why?

God knows that He can't trust mankind to uphold their end of the promise, so God establishes these covenants based on Himself.

Hebrews 6:13—For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater to swear by, he swore by himself:

God is the ultimate promise keeper—we are habitual promise breakers.

So God, not only underwrites the promise, but fulfills the promise regardless of what mankind does or does not do.

Biblically speaking, if someone breaks a promise, they would then be cursed—God can't be cursed because God doesn't break promises. (Dt 29:14).

Numbers 23:19—God is not a man, that he might lie,
~~or a son of man~~, that he might change his mind.

Does he speak and not act,
or promise and not fulfill?

What's the point?

KEYPOINT 2:

- God is the Witness

God is always the underwriter of a promise—meaning that if it's broken, punishment from God follows.

Understanding God as underwriter is important—this is something that the scribes and Pharisees never got.

Have you ever heard someone say, “I swear on my mother's grave?”

That is one blasphemous statement!

How can someone's grave

- Enforce someone's promise?
- Insure and bind someone to an agreement?
- Be a witness to the promise itself?

Today we hear things like:

- "*I swear on my life.*" This may be a sincere pledge, but it's based on this man's fallible existence.
- "*On my honor.*" A vow based on personal integrity or reputation—once again, there is no one to enforce the vow when it is broken.
- "*I swear on my children's lives.*" Is this a good idea? Invoking the lives of children to enforce a broken promise?
- "*Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye!*" Has anyone honestly expected to die if they broke a promise?

These are all forms of blasphemy—all things that profane the name of God—God's name is holy.

We are not to take the name of the Lord lightly.

- *I swear to God.*" Here we're getting closer to the truth. A person who says this invokes God as his witness—that when he breaks this promise, God will punish him.
- "*As God is my witness.*" Here's the point. God is always a witness when we make or break our promises.

And when people break their vows, oaths, and promises, it is a heinous sin against God first and the person second.

Why is it so heinous?

It's heinous because when we make a promise, God is our witness.

And if we make promises flippantly, then we are simply using God to get what we want at that moment, without weighing the cost of what happens when the promise is broken.

One of the Ten Commandments deals with this kind of flippancy:

Exodus 20:7—Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God, because the Lord will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses his name.

This is the reason Jesus spends so much time on promises, vows, and oaths—

KEYPOINT 3:

God is the witness to our promises, and we don't take His name lightly.

The scribes and Pharisees blasphemed God by creating a complicated system that allowed them to purposely break promises.

If that weren't wicked enough, they also taught others how to make and break promises.

Making promises is serious business in God's sight:

Psalms 50:14—Offer a thanksgiving sacrifice to God, and pay your vows to the Most High.

Psalms 61:8—Then I will continually sing of your name, fulfilling my vows day by day.

Psalms 66:13/14—I will enter your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows that my lips promised and my mouth spoke during my distress.

Isn't it interesting how rashly we make promises to God when we're in a bind—yet break them so quickly when things turn around.

 **Psalm 76:11**—*Make and keep your vows to the Lord your God; let all who are around him bring tribute to the awe-inspiring one.*

Do we see how simple that is? God is a God of simplicity and order.

Let's see how complicated the scribes and Pharisees made this.

The scribes and Pharisees say...

 **Matthew 23:16**—*'Whoever takes an oath by the temple, it means nothing. But whoever takes an oath by the gold of the temple is bound by his oath.'*

What the scribes and Pharisees taught was that this gold was special because it was located in the Jewish Temple.

So instead of saying, "I swear on my mother's grave, my life, my children's life, or on my honor,"—people in the first century said, "I swear by the temple or by the gold of the temple."

Do you see the real problem here?

How can the Temple or the gold of the Temple:

- 1) Be a witness to the promise?
- 2) Guarantee, underwrite, and enforce a broken promise?

The temple and its gold are inanimate objects.

If anything, the gold did not make the Temple holy—the Temple makes the gold holy because the Temple embodies the presence of God.

And it's God who sees people making and breaking promises.

That's why Jesus calls them...

Matthew 23:17—Blind fools!

The Greek adjective for fools is *mōros*—we get our English word, moron!

They are blind because they don't know God's Word, even though they think they do.

They claim to be experts but are moronic and ignorant of God's truth.

It's moronic to make an inanimate object the witness and underwriter of a promise.

Matthew 23:17—For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?

The answer is the Temple.

The Temple is greater than the gold in the Temple because the Temple houses the very presence of God.

The gold is simply a reflection of God's glory.

Jesus' point is that the scribes and Pharisees provided people with loopholes to avoid guilt when breaking a vow or promise.

In other words, the religious leaders are not teaching obedience, but rather deceit.

They provided a "religious system" that permitted them to rob God and others and still maintain their reputations.

↳ Illusion of holiness.

Jesus is calling them out for their lack of reverence when making promises.

They are so casual about it.

KEYPOINT 4:

We are not to trivialize what God prioritizes.

And what God prioritizes is a person's character.

We are to do what we say we are going to do.

Matthew 23:18—Also, 'Whoever takes an oath by the altar, it means nothing; but whoever takes an oath by the gift that is on it is bound by his oath.'

Jesus is simply using another illustration through the same perverted logic.

That's what religious people do—they pervert God's ways with man's ways.

Matthew 23:19—Blind people! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

The answer is the Altar but they had it back wards.

Matthew 23:20—Therefore, the one who takes an oath by the altar takes an oath by it and by everything on it.

Jesus goes into great detail here because He wants the nation of Israel to know the full implications of making promises by inanimate objects instead of God.

But the sad truth is that the Pharisees, the blind guides of the people, did not know themselves.

They were blind.

Matthew 23:21—The one who takes an oath by the temple takes an oath by it and by him who dwells in it.

Matthew 23:22—And the one who takes an oath by heaven takes an oath by God's throne and by him who sits on it.

Jesus instructs the crowd on how to make a promise correctly—*by God for God*.

Lastly, we need to fast forward to the Epistle of James.

James' epistle is amazing. It's filled with such practical wisdom.

James teaches on trials and maturity, hearing and doing the Word of God, the sin of favoritism, faith and works, the sin of our tongue, pride and humility, our will vs. God's will, and how to wait on the Lord.

After all of that—this is one of the last things he teaches...

James 5:12—Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "yes" mean "yes," and your "no" mean "no," so that you won't fall under judgment.

→ MAKE A PROMISE

How simple is that?

Don't put yourself in a position where you may sin.

In other words, don't make unnecessary promises.

APPLICATION:

I want to close by looking at necessary promises as well.

Many of our official vows or promises come from professional, legal, civic, and religious commitments.

1. **Hippocratic Oath** (Medical Professionals)

- Ethical code to do no harm.

2. **Professional Oaths**

- Certain professions often take oaths to uphold ethical standards,

 3. **Oath of Office** (Public Officials)

- Sworn by elected or appointed officials, such as presidents, judges, or civil servants.

 4. **Oath of Citizenship**

- Pledging allegiance to the US Constitution and renouncing foreign allegiances.

 5. **Military Oaths**

- Sworn by service members upon enlistment to protect your country.

 6. **Oath of Truthfulness** in the Court of Law:

- "Do you swear that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

 7. **Marriage Vows**

- "I, take you, to be my wedded wife/husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance."—in other words, "As God as our witness."

 8. **Religious Oaths or Vows**

Just as God has said that man should not be alone, neither are we to be alone in community.

God's chosen people are called the Bride of Christ.

Just as Christ, the Groom, has made a commitment to His church, we are to make a commitment to Him through His people.

That commitment is called membership—*Melos* in the Greek (1 Cor. 6 and 12).

Our responsibilities to the church that we call home.

A. Attending regularly

Hebrews 10:25—not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

B. Living a pure life

Philippians 1:27—As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

C. Praying for Church growth

Acts 16:5—So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

D. Inviting the unchurched to attend.

Luke 14:23—Go out into the highways and hedges and make them come in, so that my house may be filled.

E. Warmly welcoming those who visit.

Romans 15:7—welcome one another, just as Christ also welcomed you, to the glory of God.

F. Discovering my gifts and talents

1 Peter 4:10—Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.



G. Serving faithfully



Philippians 2:3—Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves.



H. Tithing financially



2 Corinthians 9:7—Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver.

I usually make a copy of the one-sheet document that we use for church membership and ask everyone to keep it in their Bible so that they can pray for these specific things.

So that is a short study on what God has to say about us keeping our word.

We are not to be blind in this area of promises.

We are called to see with spiritual eyes.

If the Lord has revealed to you an area where you have not kept your word, you need to confess that as sin and repent—to not do that again.



PRAYER

DOXOLOGY

BENEDICTION

“May the Lord bless you and protect you;

***May the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;***

***May the Lord look with favor on you
and give you peace.” ’ (Num. 6:24)***

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