

Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 23:1-12 | The Sermon That Gets Jesus Killed
Sunday October 5, 2025

WELCOME:

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

REVIEW:

We have spent the last three months examining the last week of Jesus's life.
Beginning in Matthew 21:

- Monday—Palm Sunday / Triumphal Entry = King
- Tuesday—Cleanses the Temple / House of Worship / County Fair / Bingo Parlor = High Priest. *Prayer*
- Wednesday—Curses a fig tree = Prophet.

These three days are important because they emphasize Jesus' primary offices:
King, Priest, and Prophet.

Usually, these three offices are each held by three different people.

But not with Jesus—He holds all three offices simultaneously. How and why?

Not only is Jesus a king, He's the King of kings who rules with perfect righteousness.

Not only is Jesus a Priest, He's the High Priest who has sacrificed Himself for His people.

Not only is Jesus a Prophet, He's the Final Prophet who not only knows the future, but ordains it.

Jesus is the fulfillment of every law and office.

Over the past three months, we've watched Jesus explain why He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, why he cleansed the Temple, and why He cursed a fig tree.

The reason why evolves around His authority.

The Pharisees and Sadducees ask Jesus about His authority, but can't handle the answer directly, so Jesus answers their question indirectly with three parables. (truth)

They didn't like the parables, so they tested Jesus with three questions—and they still didn't like His answers.

Last week, we saw Jesus turn the tables on these men and ask three questions of His own.

"What do you think about the Savior?"

In other words, "Who is Jesus Christ / Who do you say that I am?"

We learned that Jesus is both God and Man.

In fact, the name Jesus means "God Saves."

Christ is His title—"Through His Anointed One."

We closed by examining ourselves and what kind of ears we have.

The scribes and Pharisees wouldn't listen to Jesus—are we?

What we hear vs. How we hear.

What about us?

1. Tickling Ears— Good things - not spiritual truths / reality
 2. American Ears— Autonomy - Little Jesus
 3. Critiquing Ears— Judge the service, music, sermon.
 4. Berean Ears— we want to know the truth, regardless of how hard it may be to swallow.
- Beneficial / Repentance

INTRODUCTION:

Just as Jesus' riding into Jerusalem in Chapter 21 marked a shift in the Gospel narrative, Chapter 23 is also a seismic shift.

Matthew 23 records Jesus' last public sermon.

It's not a sermon like the Sermon on the Mount, as found in Matthew 7.

Jesus gave that one three years ago.

He intended for the religious leaders, His disciples, and the crowd to apply that sermon (along with everything else) to their lives.

The Pharisees and scribes didn't apply it—it bounced off their hard hearts like a sidewalk because they refused to believe.

Unbelief has consequences—and that's what today's lesson is about.

Today's sermon is a sobering message of judgment regarding false teachers.

23

We're going to look at this chapter in three sections.

1. Verses 1-12: Prelude to the sermon that gets Jesus killed.
2. Verses 13-36: Jesus addresses the specific, sinful, and hypocritical actions of the religious leaders.
3. Verses 37-38: Jesus weeps over Jerusalem.

Today, Jesus teaches the crowds about the scribes and Pharisees, whom they greatly admire.

Think of the crowds admiring the scribes and Pharisees as today's world admires Billy Graham and Mother Teresa.

Jesus does the unthinkable—He gives them his most scathing critique.

For the next two weeks, we'll study the harshest language that we have ever heard from the lips of Jesus.

Jesus calls the Pharisees blind guides, fools, and whitewashed tombs! Why?

They Are False Teachers

Some people claim that Jesus' tone is too harsh, and the attack on the Pharisees is grossly unfair, even 'libelous'.

But it can't be—we have to remember who's speaking—the Lord God Almighty, where in Isaiah 6, angels constantly sing HOLY HOLY HOLY. / other Diff.

We have much to learn today, because in our culture and climate, we don't take false teachers seriously.

But all scripture does.

Jesus calls false teachers liars, hypocrites, and sons of the devil.

Scripture reserves its harshest words for false teachers. Why?

Because false teachers stand in the way of God Himself.

False religion is paraded under the illusion of truth.

False teachers teach partial truths.

— last week

Bible teachers are supposed to point you to God—not away from Him.

- How does this impact you today?
- How many false teachers are in the Verde Valley?
- How many false churches are in the Verde Valley?
- How do you know I'm not a false teacher and this is not a false church?
- How can you spot a false teacher?

Let's find out. *Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.*

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 23:1—Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples:

Matthew 23:2—"The scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses.

Matthew 23:3—Therefore do whatever they tell you, and observe it. But don't do what they do, because they don't practice what they teach.

Matthew 23:4—They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people's shoulders, but they themselves aren't willing to lift a finger to move them.

Matthew 23:5—They do everything to be seen by others: They enlarge their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels.

Matthew 23:6—They love the place of honor at banquets, the front seats in the synagogues,

Matthew 23:7—greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi' by people.

Matthew 23:8—"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' because you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters.

Matthew 23:9—Do not call anyone on earth your father, because you have one Father, who is in heaven.

Matthew 23:10—You are not to be called instructors either, because you have one Instructor, the Messiah.

Matthew 23:11—The greatest among you will be your servant.

Matthew 23:12—Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

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

PRAY:

Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction (Ps. 119:18).

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 23:1—Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples:

Jesus is done speaking to the scribes and Pharisees.

He has said all that he's going to say—Jesus doesn't beg or coerce people to believe.

People are commanded to hear the Gospel and repent—we are to turn around and leave our sin behind by following Jesus and His ways.

Not A Suggestion
We can't follow Jesus: remain where we are.

When our lives are not in alignment with God's ways—once we are aware of that — we are to immediately repent and change those ways.

We are commanded to make difficult decisions.

Last week, we saw the Pharisees walk away because they couldn't answer Jesus' questions.

As they walk away, and probably within earshot, Jesus begins to teach the crowds not about the Kingdom of Heaven, but about the kingdom of darkness.

Matthew 23:2—"The scribes and the Pharisees ...

Scribe is a man who is an expert in the Hebrew Bible.

There is no printing press, so he made copies of it.

A scribe is also a Bible teacher.

The name “Pharisee” means the “separated” ones.

They considered themselves separate from evil because they were meticulous in following specific commands in Scripture.

While most scribes were Pharisees, most Pharisees were doers rather than teachers.

They prayed at three set times daily, fasted two days a week, and tithed all that they earned.

In other words, their whole world revolves around exceeding God’s commands.

They purposely did things that God had not commanded.

Because they did all these religious-looking things, the normal Jewish person admired them and gave them a tremendous amount of respect.

Matthew 23:2—... are seated in the chair of Moses.

This verse is tricky.

There are two ways to look at this.

First, from a spiritual perspective.

An ancient Jewish tradition held that God gave the law to angels, who then passed it on to Moses, who in turn gave it to Joshua, who then gave it to the elders, who passed it on to the prophets, and the prophets gave it to the scribes.

That’s a myth—pure fiction and legend.

What is not a myth is that after the Babylonian Exile, the Lord quit sending prophets to speak for God.

We see this as the prophetic books get shorter and shorter the closer you get to Matthew.

There were prophets, but over time they began to speak less and less.

Eventually, God went silent for 400 years between Malachi and Matthew.

That's why when John the Baptizer showed up, people were so excited—everyone but the scribes and Pharisees.

Why weren't they excited about John?

During the time of silence, the scribes and Pharisees became responsible not only for copying and preserving the Hebrew Bible, but also for teaching—even though God didn't ordain them to do so.

Since there were no more prophets after the Exile, the scribes inherited the primary role of spiritual leadership in Israel.

The scribes and Pharisees had seized the position of authority.

KEYPOINT 1:

False teachers lack God-given authority.

False teachers grab an authority that is not theirs.

Jeremiah 23:16—This is what the LORD of Armies says: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They are deluding you. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the LORD's mouth.

Jeremiah 23:30—Therefore, take note! I am against the prophets"—the LORD's declaration—"who steal my words from each other.

Jeremiah 23:31—I am against the prophets"—the LORD's declaration—"who use their own tongues to make a declaration.

Jeremiah 23:32—I am against those who prophesy false dreams"—the LORD's declaration—"telling them and leading my people astray with their reckless lies. It was not I who sent or commanded them, and they are of no benefit at all to these people"—this is the LORD's declaration.

Here's the tragedy of false teachers:

Jeremiah 6:14—They have treated my people's brokenness (sin) superficially, claiming, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace.

— *False Teachers Are Nothing New.*

Matthew 23:2—The scribes and Pharisees are seated...

Today, we're used to the pastors, priests, and ministers standing at the pulpit and the congregation sitting.

It was reversed in the first century.

The teacher's chair was known as the "seat" of teaching.

It was the chair of theology.

The Greek term is *kathedra*, where we get the English word "cathedral," which originally refers to the seat of ecclesiastical (church) authority.

This is why many universities and seminaries today use the term "the chair of philosophy" or "the chair of theology."

Matthew 23:2—... are seated in the chair of Moses.

This is not just any seat or chair.

The second way to interpret this passage is not spiritually, but judicially.

The phrase, “of Moses,” is the key.

The Chair of Moses was an actual seat made of wood or stone and placed at the entrance of the town synagogue.

Exodus 18:13—*The next day Moses sat down to judge the people, and they stood around Moses from morning until evening.*

For Jews, Moses was the supreme lawgiver—the supreme spokesman for God.

Therefore, to sit in the chair of Moses was equivalent to being God’s spokesman.

But in that Exodus passage, Moses isn’t giving a sermon—he’s settling disputes and arguments, acting as a judge.

The key point is that the scribes and Pharisees had seated themselves in Moses’ chair.

Questions:

- Who ordained them? Who appointed them?
- By what authority are they given this unique authority?
- Who are they accountable to?

God did not appoint them—No passage in Scripture gives these men this authority.

Nor did the people elect them—that’s a huge problem!

They had seized that position for themselves.

They claimed to be the heirs of Moses by ordaining themselves. ^{To}

Teach & Judge the people of Israel

Ordination is an important question for every congregation.

It's important to us because it's important to God.

We see God give Moses the authority to ordain the very first priest.

Exodus 28:41—Put these (clothes) on your brother Aaron and his sons; then anoint, ordain, and consecrate them, so that they may serve me as priests.

Ordination is a very public event. It's not private, nor is it secret.

In fact, the ordination ceremony in the OT took seven days!

God didn't ordain the scribes and Pharisees to take over—they just did.

They ordained themselves—more on that later.

Matthew 23:3—Therefore do whatever they tell you, and observe it. Notice Jesus said “telling”, not “teaching.”

On the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly said, “*You have heard it said...but I tell you...*” (Matt. 5)

Jesus was constantly rebuking the scribes and Pharisees for their false teachings, extra-biblical interpretations, and man-made rules.

So why would Jesus tell everyone to do what they say when, for the past three years, Jesus has continually opposed their false teachings?

The answer comes from the dual role of the scribes and Pharisees.

Just as we have judges in our courts today, the scribes and Pharisees also filled that role.

After the parties presented their legal cases, the scribes and Pharisees told the parties what to do and what not to do.

Jesus recognizes the scribes and Pharisees to decide civil cases and tells the crowd that whatever the verdict is, it's final.

However, judging civil cases as an attorney and expositing Scripture as a pastor are two different things.

Here's the reason why Jesus is likely referring to this as a civil matter rather than a spiritual one.

Matthew 23:3—But don't do what they do, because they don't practice what they teach.

It's as if Jesus moves from civil matters to spiritual ones.

Why didn't the scribes and Pharisees do what they ~~were~~ taught?

Because they are unbelieving people.

An unbelieving person has no spiritual power.

Next, Jesus provides examples of what they do and don't do.

Matthew 23:4—They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people's shoulders, but they themselves aren't willing to lift a finger to move them.

KEYPOINT 2:

False teachers are unsympathetic.

They don't care about people.

Several weeks ago, we watched how one of the scribes asked Jesus which command, out of all 613, is the most important.

Jesus said, 'Love—*loving God and loving people.*'

The scribes and Pharisees did neither—they loved themselves.

Jesus uses an illustration to make His point.

In the first century, there were no cars, so people used donkeys and camels for transportation.

People were very careful about how they packed things on their animals.

They didn't want to overburden the animal or harm it.

There was an art and science to packing heavy loads on animals—everything had to be balanced correctly for the safety of everyone involved.

Jesus was saying that people who packed their donkeys and camels with heavy burdens were more compassionate than the scribes and Pharisees.

The scribes and Pharisees didn't care about the spiritual burden that they placed on people—it was crushing and killing them.

They not only burdened the people with the details of the Mosaic Law, but also added all kinds of rules and regulations that were not found in the law of Moses.

Today, many people, or entire denominations, have imposed additional rules on others—such as not listening to certain kinds of music, watching certain kinds of movies, wearing certain kinds of clothes, or even eating certain types of food.

All those unbiblical demands are nothing more than bondage!

Galatians 5:1—For freedom, Christ set us free. Stand firm, then, and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Jesus comes along, and the crowds love Him. Why?

Matthew 11:28— "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Matthew 11:29—Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:30—For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Handwritten notes:
 → they are poor
 =
 The scribes & Pharisees will kill you w/ their man made stairway to Heaven
 BTW, if God wants to change their entertainment habits or their attire, God will let them know in His timing. — we're not the entertainment & fashion police

Back to our Gospel passage...

Matthew 23:5—They do everything to be seen by others:

Notice the word *everything*.

Their entire religion is about themselves.

KEYPOINT 3:

False teachers live by sight and not by faith.

True Christians *are to live by faith—not by sight* (2 Cor. 5:7).

False teachers have no genuine desire to please God; they only want to be seen by others.

How do they want to be seen by others?

Look at what they do—they condemn themselves with their actions.
Here's exhibit A...

Matthew 23:5—They enlarge their phylacteries...

What's a phylactory?

Deuteronomy 11:18—"Imprint these words of mine on your hearts and minds, bind them as a sign on your hands, and let them be a symbol on your foreheads.

for symbol

The Hebrew noun is *tôṭāpōt*, which refers to a *phylactery*.

A phylactery is an object that symbolizes a spiritual truth—think of it as a necklace or a ring that you might wear that has a cross.

The ancient Jews knew this ^{verse} to be a symbol—not to be taken literally. *You can't physically imprint words on your heart & mind.*

But guess what happened?

on their hearts & arms

Some Jews built small boxes called phylacteries, which they wore during times of prayer.

Inside the box were Scripture passages. (Ex 13:3–16; Deut 6:5–9, 11:13–21).

As time passed, people began to wear them more frequently.

Others wore them as magical charms to ward off evil spirits and other dangers.

Here's Exhibit B.

Matthew 23:5—...and lengthen their tassels.

At the bottom of their robes

The use of tassels originated in Scripture.

Numbers 15:38—“Speak to the Israelites and tell them that throughout their generations they are to make tassels for the corners of their garments, and put a blue cord on the tassel at each corner.

Numbers 15:39—These will serve as tassels for you to look at, so that you may remember all the Lord's commands and obey them and not prostitute yourselves by following your own heart and your own eyes.

Numbers 15:40—This way you will remember and obey all my commands and be holy to your God.

Tassels were also symbols/reminders of God's holiness.

Leviticus 20:26—You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be mine.

Jesus Himself wore tassels.

Remember the woman with the blood disorder?

Matthew 9:20—~~And behold~~, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment,
Joan

Next, Jesus provides more evidence of the scribes and Pharisees' hypocrisy.

Matthew 23:6—They love the place of honor at banquets, the front seats in the synagogues,

Matthew 23:7—greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi' by people.

KEYPOINT 4:

False teachers lack humility.

They long to be in the center of attention.

They loved their titles as many people do today.

Tragically, many people find their identities in their titles rather than in Christ.

Rabbi simply means teacher.

But In the first century, titles did much more than describe an office, a position, or a job function.

The rabbi was considered to be the most important person in a disciple's life, surpassing even their earthly father.

And that's why Jesus continues...

Matthew 23:8—"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' because you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters.

Matthew 23:9—Do not call anyone on earth your father, because you have one Father, who is in heaven.

Matthew 23:10—You are not to be called instructors either, because you have one Instructor, the Messiah.

This title thing must have been an enormous deal with the Pharisees because Jesus spends four verses on it.

Jesus is not referring to family ties—calling your dad, dad.

He is referring to spiritual fathers.

His point is that we are equal.

We have different functions, but are equal under the lordship of Christ.

These different but equal functions and roles make the local church healthy.

Is it a sin to call someone by a title?

No, why? Because no one has more titles than Jesus! Why?

Because titles describe the many facets of Jesus.

+ **John 13:13**—You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are speaking rightly, since that is what I am.

Paul uses the title “father” for himself.

+ **1 Corinthians 4:15**—For you may have countless instructors in Christ, but you don't have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

+ **Ephesians 4:11**—And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,

Why are these titles and roles important today?

+ **Ephesians 4:12**—to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ,

The sin comes when the individual rabbi, pastor, or priest desires in his heart or demands that people call him a specific title.

Or the sin comes from the church when they develop ecclesiastical hierarchies that elevate certain people above others.

The only hierarchy that the church is to know is Jesus as Teacher and God as Father.

False teachers, on the other hand, demand obedience to themselves.

KEYPOINT 5:

Pastors, priests, and ministers need to remember that they are not the source of truth, which is God's Word, nor the illumination of truth, which is God's Spirit.

True pastors, priests, and ministers are responsible for the correct exposition of God's Word, while the congregation is responsible for believing, repenting, and obeying God's Word.

Matthew 23:11—The greatest among you will be your servant.

Godly leaders do things they don't want to do—they pick up their own crosses and follow Jesus just like every other Christian.

By doing so, they follow Jesus' example.

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

Philippians 2:4—Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.

Philippians 2:5—Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,

Philippians 2:6—who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited.

Philippians 2:7—Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man,

Philippians 2:8—he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

It's hard to find another passage in Scripture that reveals the complete humility and humiliation of Christ Himself.

Matthew 23:12—Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

→ How Christians Act

This is the way of God—down, serve, suffer for others.

This is also the opposite of the world's standard.

The world teaches people to use and abuse people, to stab them in the back and climb over them to get to the top.

That's not what Jesus says or does.

If someone wants to be great, they need to humble themselves.

If they don't, God will humiliate them.

This is the prelude to the sermon that gets Jesus killed.

Next week, we'll watch Jesus continue preaching this sermon as He curses the Scribes & Pharisees.

APPLICATION:

- How does this impact you today?
- How many false teachers are in the Verde Valley?
- How many false churches are in the Verde Valley?
- How do you know I'm not a false teacher and this is not a false church?
- How can you spot a false teacher?

In other words, how many people are in our backyard doing what the scribes and Pharisees did in the first century?

Grabbing the seat of Moses for themselves—ordaining themselves—and claiming an authority that they do not have.

False Churches:

1. Refuse to teach the inerrancy of Scripture.
2. Rainbow flag
3. Women as pastors

False Teachers:

1. *Not a member/serving in a local church.*

This means they have no authority above them—they are their own authority.

Who do they go to when they have questions? Or are they all knowing?

Where do they go? Where is their church family—community?

Many times they will claim that God is their sole authority—isn't that convenient?

It's pretty obvious that God works *through* His people—not apart from them.

“Christians can not call God their Father— without the church being their mother.”
(Cyprian of Carthage)

How much more so is it for Bible teachers?

 2. *Many false teachers lack formal training*

You're not going to a dentist who hasn't been trained, are you?

Are you going to hire a plumber who hasn't been apprenticed? Who hasn't earned his license?

Speaking of apprenticeship— Scripture calls it discipleship.

 3. *Many false teachers are not personally disciplined.*

Who is pouring their life into this Bible Teacher?

What kind of people is this he hanging around?


In the OT, God commanded people to stay within their own tribes.

What tribe is the Bible teacher in?

What kind of reputation does he have?

What type of lifestyle is he living?

How is his homelife? How is his wife? Kids?

 4. *Where is their proof texts?* ^{→ bibliography} What source material are they using? Who are they reading? Are they reading anyone at all?

Just as the scribes and Pharisees were admired by the crowd in the first century, the world admires false teachers today.

I think it's a terrifying thing for someone to be invited to church today. Why?

Because of the sheer volume of false teachers and false churches.

Then there's the pandemic of false teachers online.

Yet, this doesn't mean that true churches are not to fulfill the Great Commission.

We know that God is sovereign. We know that not one of His will be lost.

At the same time, it doesn't mean that we sit back and do nothing.

God has always had a tiny remnant of His people.

Through the mystery of salvation, He commands us to share Jesus day by day.

 **PRAYER**

LORD'S SUPPER

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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