

Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 23:23-36 | The Relentlessness of a Holy God
Sunday October 26, 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 been studying the last week of Jesus' life for the past three months.

This last week is Passover.

Passover is the biggest celebration of the year for the Jews as they celebrate God freeing them from slavery in Egypt.

America doesn't have a holiday that would be equivalent to Israel's Passover, but if we combined July 4th, Christmas, and Resurrection Sunday, we might be headed in the right direction.

On Monday of this Passover week, we watched Jesus fulfil prophecy by entering Jerusalem on a donkey.

We watched how the whole city was in an uproar as Jesus entered the city.

They worshipped Him as their Lord and Savior.

On Tuesday, we watched Jesus take control of the Temple by kicking out all the merchants.

Israel's leaders turned the Temple into a shopping mall and a county fair when it's supposed to be a house of prayer and worship.

On Wednesday, we watched Jesus teach the crowds and frustrate the false teachers—the scribes and Pharisees.

In their anger and frustration, these men walk away from Jesus once again.

They turn their backs on the God whom they claim to worship.

As they walk away, Jesus preaches his last sermon.

This sermon is the one that gets him killed—with those same scribes and Pharisees leading the charge.

This is still Wednesday of Passover week.

Jesus spends all day teaching in the Temple, and by Friday morning, Jesus will be crucified.

How can this sermon not get Jesus killed?

Jesus damns the religious leaders to hell.

He repeatedly calls them “false teachers, hypocrites, blind guides, and blind morons.”

Jesus exposed them for who they truly are—liars and deceivers.

Last Sunday

Jesus exposed their religious system for intentionally breaking promises and vows.

From all the history and background of last week, I hope and pray we all have a better understanding of how

1. It is essential to keep our word,
2. Not to make unnecessary promises.

3. Especially the importance of keeping our vows to our spouse and our church, because we have called God to be a witness to these promises.

That's A short Review

INTRODUCTION:

We continue our study of Jesus' last sermon today.

It is a blistering report card on the hearts of the religious leaders.

Jesus continues to call them out on how they have falsely shepherded His people.

We'll see how Jesus specifically calls them out on their sin, and we'll examine those sins.

However, as we read, I want you to notice the larger theme—and that's the state of their hearts.

Jesus compares and contrasts what's on the inside versus what's on the outside.

The "inside" refers to their hearts, while the "outside" refers to their hands—what they do.

People can be very good at putting on a religious front—even convincing themselves that their religious duties are quite noble.

But Jesus pulls off the mask—and goes to the heart of the matter.

How does this apply to you?

There is a relentlessness of walking with a Holy God.

God is working on you right now to change you in a specific area of life.

Change is painful—but refusing to change is even more so.

Like

The scribes and Pharisees refused to change—and we'll see the consequences of that today.

As we examine today's passage, let's see how it will help you change and walk with God.

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

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 23:23—"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, and yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These things should have been done without neglecting the others.

Matthew 23:24—Blind guides! You strain out a gnat, but gulp down a camel!

Matthew 23:25—"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

Matthew 23:26—Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside of it may also become clean.

Matthew 23:27—"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity.

Matthew 23:28—In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Matthew 23:29—"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous,

Matthew 23:30—and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we wouldn't have taken part with them in shedding the prophets' blood.'

Matthew 23:31—So you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

Matthew 23:32—Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors' sins!

Matthew 23:33—"Snakes! Brood of vipers! How can you escape being condemned to hell?

Matthew 23:34—This is why I am sending you prophets, sages, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.

Matthew 23:35—So all the righteous blood shed on the earth will be charged to you, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

Matthew 23:36—Truly I tell you, all these things will come on this generation.

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

PRAY:

God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 23:23—“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

Jesus begins with his standard greeting for the religious leaders.

“Woe to you”—A woe is a warning and a rebuke.

Think of it as a curse.

Matthew 23:23—“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

The scribes and Pharisees were the self-appointed religious leaders of the first century.

He calls them hypocrites because they are false teachers, fakes, frauds, liars, and deceivers.

Matthew 23:23—You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin (parsley),

Jesus first addresses their tithing.

Tithing is giving ten percent of your income to the Tabernacle/Temple—it was an OT requirement.

Deuteronomy 14:22—“Each year you are to set aside a tenth of all the produce grown in your fields.”

The crops grown were primarily grain, ^{-oil} olives, fruits, vegetables, and ^{-wine} grapes.

The Mosaic Law required tithing (10%) of those things grown in fields during the harvest.

Harvest time was also another celebration—*The Feast of Weeks*.

But the scribes and Pharisees went above and beyond tithing their crops.

Why? Because that's what religious people do—they try to impress God with their good works.

Matthew 23:23—You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin.

So think about what's going on—mint, dill, and cumin are all herbs/spices that grow in a small pot.

Most people in the first century would keep them in their kitchen near a windowsill, and if they needed one of these spices, they would pluck a leaf or grab a seed.

But not the scribes and Pharisees, they would try to impress God by tithing their spices.

They would carefully count out the leaves and seeds, separating one in ten for God. — *say/paper*
It's like us finding a dime on the sidewalk and remembering to tithe a penny on Sunday.

They loved the useless, mindless minutiae of self-identified “good works” that were above and beyond God's commands.

But their good works are an illusion, because we don't impress God.
We obey God—we come to Him on His holy terms, not by our sinful opinions.

Jesus goes on to tell us what truly matters...

Matthew 23:23—and yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These things should have been done without neglecting the others.

Jesus isn't condemning them for tithing—these men get a gold star in their counting.

Why? Tithing is easy.

However, they neglected people in the process of counting.

They prioritized religious tasks instead of relationships.

Jesus doesn't just pull *justice, mercy, and faithfulness* out of the air.

Some 700 years earlier, that prophet had declared,

Micah 6:8—Mankind, God he has told each of you what is good and what it is the Lord requires of you:
to act justly, (treat people fairly)
to love faithfulness, (kindness)
and to walk humbly with your God. (Faith)

Jesus' judgment is about their preoccupation with religious tasks.

KEYPOINT 1:

Jesus curses the scribes and Pharisees for inverting divine priorities.

Jesus is not telling them not to tithe—Christianity 101.

He's telling them they have a heart problem.

Religious tasks are done with our hands—busyness without thought, meaning, and even God.

KEY QUESTION:

We must continue to ask, "Where is God in this?"

God's priorities are the relentless pursuit of our hearts.

We are commanded to love God and love people.

Unfortunately, Christians do the same thing as scribes and Pharisees—invert our priorities.

We do this when we don't keep the main thing the main thing.

The main thing is the repentance of our sin and our submission to the Lord Jesus Christ through His Word. → *when rest God's Word, you hear His voice.*

Tragically, we have done a remarkable job of majoring on minors and minoring on majors just like the scribes and Pharisees.

KEYPOINT 2:

At RBC, we teach that Christians are to be unified in the Gospel essentials, freedom of choice in things non-essential, and grace in all things. *SALVATION*

Matthew 23:24—Blind guides! You strain out a gnat, but gulp down a camel!

Next, Jesus points out their hypocrisy with an illustration everyone in the first century would understand.

Serve on the Mount
Matthew 7:3—Why do you look at the splinter in your brother's eye but don't notice the beam of wood in your own eye?

Matthew 7:4—Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the splinter out of your eye,' and look, there's a beam of wood in your own eye?

Matthew 7:5—Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's eye.

Jesus is using the gnats and camels in the same way.

He refers to things that are ceremonially unclean (Lev. 11:4, 42).

The Jews were not to touch things that would defile them.

If they did, they had to undergo a purification process.

ILLUSTRATION:

In the first century, they didn't have the purification process that we have today, and insects would get into the grape harvest and be pressed into the wine.

Because of this filtration problem, some of these scribes and Pharisees would drink wine through their clenched teeth to strain out the insects.

And by focusing on the little things, they neglected the bigger things, like people.

They are worried about swallowing a gnat through their outward behavior, but spiritually, they gulp down a dirty, stinky camel with a bad attitude!

Matthew 23:25—"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish,

The Greek noun behind dish is *paropsis*. (Par-oh-ip-cees)

This is no ordinary dish, but fine china.

This was good stuff that mama wouldn't allow you to touch growing up.

It had its own place in a china cabinet and was only used for special occasions.

The idea is to serve someone a gourmet meal with fine china and fine wine.

But the food itself is rank, rotting, and rancid!

The fine china is beautiful, but what good is it when the food is vile?

The vile food represents their hearts.

Matthew 23:25—but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

Inside—a reference to their hearts.

The outside looks good, but the inside is not.

Greed is the Greek noun *harpagē* (Har-pah-yay).

Your translation may say 'robbery' or 'extortion.'

The sense is that the scribes and Pharisees have an excessive and violent desire to always plunder from those they are supposed to shepherd.

Self-indulgence is a lack of self-control—unrestrained to serve themselves.

In other words, they are thieves.

Mark 12:40—They devour widows' houses ...

They're not just thieves; they're thieves of the worst kind because they're using God's holy name to kill, steal, and destroy people.

BTW, not much has changed today.

Without repentance, time changes nothing.

All we have to do is click on social media, and we'll see the modern-day 21st-century scribes and Pharisees devouring widows' homes.

These men are guilting, shaming, and extorting people out of their homes and retirements today.

Many of these false teachers today belong in jail.

They Are CON ARTISTS using religion to sell you a lie.

Matthew 23:26—Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside of it may also become clean.

Jesus continues his theme—inside vs. outside.

In other words, repent because repentance changes everything.

His illustration is quite striking.

How disgusting to think of someone not washing their dishes, day after day, but using them over and over as if nothing is wrong.

That's the state of their hearts.

If they would repent, the Lord would give them a new heart.

A new heart changes everything.

With a soft, contrite heart, their external behavior would take care of itself.

That's why the Christian faith is not about behavior modification—it's about heart surgery that can only be performed by the Great Physician Himself.

When people focus on external sin without a heart change, they will only get temporary results.

True change starts from the inside out.

By God's grace, change is long and painful—and it's designed to be that way. Why?

60M
So God gets all the credit for your transformation.

No one in Heaven is singing the song, "I did it my way."

Matthew 23:27—"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside,

Jesus provides a more disturbing illustration comparing the inside vs the outside.

He moves from rancid food to graveyards.

Let me provide some context.

Keep in mind that this is Passover week in Jerusalem.

There are millions of people walking from everywhere to enter the city.

So what the Jews did was paint the graves and tombs around Jerusalem bright white. Why?

Although they did have graveyards, many graves were not always together in one place—they were scattered throughout the land.

So, they painted these tombs bright white to make them look nice, but they also didn't want travelers accidentally touching a tomb or grave.

If they did, they became ceremonially unclean for seven days, which would then disqualify them from celebrating Passover (Num. 19:16).

Matthew 23:27— *but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity.*

On the outside, the graves and tombs looked beautiful, but on the inside, nothing had changed.

No matter how pretty you make the gravesite, the grave still contains a corpse.

KEYPOINT 2:

False teachers contaminate everyone they touch.

Listening to a false teacher is like touching a grave—there's no life—all death.

It was true in the first century, and it's true in the twenty-first century.

Please keep that in mind as you allow certain preachers into your own home by listening to them online.

Matthew 23:28—*In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

Jesus brings his analogy home.

Jesus has repeatedly said that these false teachers are hypocrites.

We know what hypocrisy is, but what about lawlessness?

Anomia is the Greek noun. (Ann-oh-mia)

The picture here is that the scribes and Pharisees are absolutely uncooperative, belligerent, and defiant of God's law.

They are law-less. They are without the law.

The rules don't apply to them. They are above the law. How so?

Jesus repeatedly tells us the problem is a heart issue, so inwardly the scribes and Pharisees don't love God; they despise Him.

Because if they did love God, they would love His Son.

But they didn't love God's Son—they hated him so much that they would kill Him. So, if someone hates God's son, they, by default, also hate God the Father.

John 5:37—The Father who sent me has himself testified about me. You have not heard his voice at any time, and you haven't seen his form.

John 5:38—You don't have his word residing in you, because you don't believe the one he sent.

John 5:39—You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me.

John 5:40—But you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.

John 5:41—“I do not accept glory from people,

John 5:42—but I know you—that you have no love for God within you.

Jesus continues His analogy with tombs and graveyards.

Matthew 23:29—“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous,

Matthew 23:30—and you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we wouldn't have taken part with them in shedding the prophets' blood.’

One of the many traditions observed by the Pharisees was to build, improve, and embellish the tombs of martyrs.

The irony is that it was their “spiritual fathers” who killed these prophets.

In their pride, they thought of themselves as superior to spiritual forefathers—convincing themselves that they wouldn’t participate in murdering God’s prophets.

But Jesus goes on...

Matthew 23:31—So you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

In other words, an apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.

Their rejection of Jesus as their Lord and Savior proves that they are in the lineage of hypocrites and murderers.

KEYPOINT 3:

Religious people kill God’s people.

How many holy wars do we have to have before we get this?

It’s not only the world that hates Christians.

It’s much easier to love your “religion,” your theological systems, convictions, and even your ministry instead of loving the person—Lord Jesus Christ.

Religious tasks are one way/one-sided.

However, a relationship with the Lord Jesus is a two-way street.

BTW, that relationship isn’t equal.

Jesus is the Sovereign King, High Priest, the Lord of all—we, on the other hand, are his slaves, servants, and by His grace, His bride.

Matthew 23:32—Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors' sins!

In other words, Go on, then, and finish what your ancestors started!”

Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees to finish their plans to kill Him.

You go on and continue the family tradition of killing God's prophets—and they will, by killing the Prophet of all prophets.

Matthew 23:33—“Snakes! Brood of vipers! How can you escape being condemned to hell?”

Jesus calls these men the same thing John the Baptizer did—snakes.

And not just snakes, but deadly snakes.

When someone gets bit by a false teacher, watch out.

And we all know what happened to John.

It's a rhetorical question, meaning that there is no way they cannot be judged to hell. → Guilty

Illustration: Burning fields.

When Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees a brood of vipers, He was revealing that these men are both evil and deadly.

Matthew 23:34—This is why I am sending you prophets, sages, and scribes.

Matthew is using Jewish terminology because his primary audience was Jewish Christians.

Prophets are the preachers. Sages are teachers. The scribes are writers.

This new group of people all come from the 12 Apostles. → Disciples

 **Matthew 23:34**—Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.

After the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension back to Heaven, Jesus will continue to send true teachers to remind the false teachers of their upcoming judgment.

But because they are false teachers, and false teachers refuse to listen and repent, they will instead kill and crucify the Apostles.

Killing refers to the Jewish method of stoning.

Crucifixion refers to the Roman method of execution.

Ex:

Tradition states that Peter was crucified upside down.

Stephen was stoned, and James was murdered (Acts 7:58–60; 12:2).

All the apostles were murdered except for John.

John was sent to an island to die.

The book of Acts highlights how the Jews literally chased the Apostles from town to town.

Matthew 23:35—So all the righteous blood shed on the earth will be charged to you,

The apostle Paul says...

Romans 6:23—For the wages of sin is death,

Without confession of sin and the turning away and giving up of our sin (repentance), we live our lives piling sin upon sin.

Sin has consequences—eternal death.

I want you to consider the incredible opportunity the scribes and Pharisees wasted.

They had the opportunity to truly learn from the God of the universe.

They had the opportunity to be in the presence of the holy God without dying.

No generation in world history has had, or will ever have, this same opportunity again.

They had God incarnate in their midst, yet they would not ^{believe} have Him.

They wasted it.

I can't help but think about the American church today.

In the same way, we stand on the shoulders of theological giants.

For the past 2,000 years, we've had the benefit of accumulation.

Accumulated thoughts, writings, doctrines, and theological confessions.

In addition,

We not only have the Bible in multiple languages but also different translations in multiple languages.

We live in a generation that has more opportunities to hear the Gospel and respond to it than anyone else in human history.

Yet, with each successive generation, more and more people reject the gospel.

Some people reject the Good News with apathy, while others reject it with anger and violence.

Regardless, due to the amount of truth conveyed, each generation places more guilt on itself than its forefathers.

In other words, every time the gospel is proclaimed, it either draws people closer to Christ or drives them further away.

There's two sides of the Gospel message.

The Gospel not only brings people to salvation, but it also brings divine judgment.

As the saying goes, the same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay.

Romans 9:18—So then, he has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Such is the mysteriousness of God.

God not only is a God of love, mercy, and grace but of holiness, justice, wrath upon sin, and judgment because of sin.

Please know that Scripture is equally emphatic about both aspects of His nature.

Matthew 23:35—from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

→ CAir: Abel
We know who Abel is—Zechariah is the prophet who wrote the book that bears his name in the OT.

“Abel to Zechariah” is a figure of speech — “from Genesis to Revelation.”

Technically, Zechariah was not the last murder in the OT chronologically.

The book of Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Abel and Zechariah are the first and last recorded murders in the Hebrew Bible OT.

Jesus' point is that the scribes and Pharisees will be held accountable for all of the blood of the OT prophets in addition to the rejection and crucifixion of Himself.

Why? Because they are the leaders who witnessed God Himself and still rejected Him.

Matthew 23:36—*Truly I tell you, all these things will come on this generation.*

“All these things”—that is, the multiplied guilt and judgment since the Fall in Genesis 3—will fall on the scribes and Pharisees.

We see this prophecy come true less than 40 years later when this exact generation experienced the total destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in a.d 70.

This is a time that Jesus calls the “days of vengeance” (Luke 21:22).

Deuteronomy 32:35—*Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay.*

Isaiah 63:4—*For I planned the day of vengeance, and the year of my redemption came.*

~~The LORD takes vengeance against his foes;
he is furious with his enemies.~~

Nahum 1:3—The LORD is slow to anger but great in power;
the LORD will never leave the guilty unpunished.

sin is that serious → Does that ~~is~~ ^{is} serious as Jesus?

After the destruction of the Temple, God did away with the scribes and Pharisees once and for all, and the OT sacrificial system. Why?

Because the ultimate sacrifice had been made through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Propitiation (the satisfaction of God's wrath on sin had been satisfied) had been made by God's own blood—there was no need for the Temple anymore.

APPLICATION:

A large blue triangle is drawn on a sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines. The triangle is isosceles, with its base at the bottom and its apex at the top. The lines of the triangle extend slightly beyond the top and bottom edges of the page.

Nahum 1:2—The LORD is a jealous and avenging God;
 the LORD takes vengeance
 and is fierce in wrath.
 The LORD takes vengeance against his foes;
 he is furious with his enemies.

Nahum 1:3—The LORD is slow to anger but great in power;
 the LORD will never leave the guilty unpunished.

Sin is THAT serious. Do we take sin as serious as Jesus does?
 After the destruction of the Temple, God did away with the scribes and Pharisees
 once and for all, and the OT sacrificial system. Why?

Because the ultimate sacrifice had been made through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Propitiation (the satisfaction of God's wrath on sin had been satisfied) had been
 made by God's own blood—there was no need for the Temple anymore.

APPLICATION:

How do we apply Jesus' sermon about the scribes and Pharisees to our own lives?

I mentioned at the beginning that God is a God of change—and how change is
 designed by God to be difficult.

Here's the irony—the Lord is immutable. He never changes.

If God could change that means He isn't God.

God is free from change.

Hebrews 13:8—Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Yet, He's in the business of always, constantly, consistently, and even relentlessly
 changing us.

Even in Heaven, we'll be free from sin—but we'll always be growing in our relationship with the Lord and one another.

One of the beautiful things about understanding God's sovereignty is knowing that your life is not left to chance.

Either God is sovereign over everything— or He's sovereign over nothing.

Scripture makes it crystal clear that God allows or ordains all things in your life—including trials and tragedies.

It's during these trials and tragedies that our faith is tested.

It's in the midst of broken hearts, chapter seven bankruptcy, cancer, where our spiritual muscle is built.

Now Jesus is relentless in this sermon about the scribes and Pharisees.

He doesn't let these men get away with anything.

Their sin is that serious—and so is ours.

Now, if you're a Believer this morning, you're sin is paid for/atoned for—reconciled.

The Father's wrath has been propitiated—your sin has been satisfied by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

But, that doesn't mean that this is your best life now—that life is come.

Please know that the Lord is relentless in changing and purifying your faith.

KEYPOINT:

God loves you too much for you to stay where you are.

“Does it have to be this hard?”

Answer: At times, yes.

That’s the whole point—there are seasons in our lives where we are supposed to be in over our heads.

Being in over our heads drives us to our knees.

As you’re on your knees, don’t forget to ask the question: *“Where is God in all of this?”*

Be reassured that although you may not feel His presence, He is with you.

He has given you His Spirit, His Word and His church—you’re not alone.

So my encouragement to you—is to thank God for His *relentlessness*.

Thank Him for the trial you’re in.

Thank Him that His grace is sufficient.



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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