



Kingdom Preparation

The Focus of Your Faith

Matthew 23:1-12

How to Prepare

Begin preparing by reading the full passage a few times. Then answer the questions for yourself. Then think about how your Small Group might answer them. Try re-wording the questions to fit you and your Small Group. Don't feel tied down to the discussion guide, just be sure to discuss the main point of the text in your conversations.

Resources-

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-making-of-a-modern-pharisee>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-self-centered.html>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Christ-centered-life.html>

Sermon Outline:

Matthew 23:1-12

1. Self-Centered Faith Keeps Double Standards. Vv. 1-4
2. Self-Centered Faith Craves Approval and Praise. Vv. 5-7
3. Christ-Centered Faith Compels Humble Service. Vv. 8-12

Matthew 23:1-12

Pharisaism Exposed

- 1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples,
- 2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;
- 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.
- 4 They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.
- 5 But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.
- 6 They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues,
- 7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.
- 8 But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you

are all brothers.

- 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.
- 10 Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.
- 11 But the greatest among you shall be your servant.
- 12 Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

Discussion Questions

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 23:1-12.

INTRODUCTION

Here is a question or two to help introduce the topic and jump-start discussion.

1. If you had to describe the difference between religion and relationship with God in just one sentence, what would you say?

UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION

These questions should help your Small Group dig deeper into the text and then apply it to your lives today.

I. Self-Centered Faith Keeps Double Standards. Vv. 1-4

2. What is a double standard, and in what ways did the scribes and Pharisees have double standards? What is wrong with double standards, and what motivates people to have them?

3. What are some ways Christians "accidentally" project high standards onto others while giving ourselves a pass? How can we identify the gap between what we say we believe and how we actually live our day-to-day lives?

4. Why is it so much easier to audit someone else's spiritual life and flaws than it is to honestly examine our own? What is the antidote to hypocrisy in a community, and how can we build a culture where it's safe to confess our struggles rather than hide them?

II. Self-Centered Faith Craves Approval and Praise. Vv. 5-7

5. What motivated the scribes and Pharisees, and what was the goal of their good deeds? What is the difference between being given approval and praise versus pursuing approval and praise?

6. What are the modern places of honor or status symbols that Christians secretly chase today? In what ways do we use religious language or ministry positions to build our own reputation rather than point people to Christ?

7. How does a constant need for human approval and validation quietly strangle our intimacy with God? What practical steps can we take to ensure our acts of service or devotion remain focused on God rather than a human crowd?

III. Christ-Centered Faith Compels Humble Service. Vv. 8-12

8. What is the main point that Jesus is making in verses 8-10? How should the reality that we are all equals under God in Christ change the way we interact with others, especially those who look up to us?

9. How would you describe the difference between false humility and the humility Jesus is talking about? Why can it be difficult to pursue true humility in our society today?

10. How does humble service make someone great, and in what way does God exalt them? Think of someone you know who embodies humble service... what makes their faith so compelling, and how does it reflect Jesus?

Commentary (from ESV Study Bible)

Matt. 21:1–23:39 The Messiah Asserts His Authority over Jerusalem. Jesus' authority over Jerusalem is revealed in his triumphal entry (21:1–11), actions in the temple (21:12–17), cursing the fig tree (21:18–22), debates with religious leaders (21:23–22:46), and woes pronounced on the teachers of the law and the Pharisees (23:1–39).

Matt. 23:1–12 Warnings against the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. Jesus warns the crowd and his disciples not to follow the false leadership of the Pharisees (vv. 1–12), then directly pronounces woes upon those leaders for their deadly actions (see vv. 13–39).

Matt. 23:2 The scribes and the Pharisees were two distinct groups, though there was some overlap between them: the scribes were the professional interpretative experts on the Torah itself, while the Pharisees were experts in theological matters that the Torah raised. Moses' seat. Traditionally understood as referring symbolically to the authority of Moses. However, recent archaeological evidence has revealed a literal chair found in early synagogues. Whether literal or figurative, it refers to a place from which experts on the law taught.

Matt. 23:3 so practice and observe whatever they tell you. Jesus recognized the Pharisees' official function as interpreters of the Law of Moses, and insofar as they accurately interpreted Scripture, they were to be obeyed. However, "so" (Gk. *oun*) connects this verse with v. 2 and the mention of Moses, and therefore "whatever they tell you" should probably be limited to "whatever they tell you about the Law of Moses" and does not include the Pharisees' later extensive additions to Mosaic laws which rabbinic teachers made. but not what they do. Jesus is about to show that much of the Pharisees' practice and their extrabiblical tradition is wrong.

Matt. 23:4 Heavy burdens describes the extrabiblical tradition of the rabbis that was a pillar of the Pharisaic branch of Judaism. It was intended as a means of making the OT relevant to new life situations, but its massive obligations had become burdensome and oppressive.

Matt. 23:5 phylacteries. Small cube-shaped cases made of leather, containing Scripture passages written on parchment. They were worn on the left arm and forehead as a literal way to obey the admonition of Deut. 11:18 (cf. Ex. 13:9; Deut. 6:8). fringes. Tassels with a blue cord that were attached to the four corners of a man's garment (Num. 15:37–41; Deut. 22:12), reminding the people to obey God's commandments and to be holy (Num. 15:40).

Commentary (from ESV Study Bible)

Matt. 23:6 place of honor. Seating at banquets was assigned to guests based on their rank or status. best seats in the synagogues. Excavations at early Galilean synagogues indicate that bench seats were built along the sides of the synagogue (see note on Luke 4:16; and The Synagogue and Jewish Worship). In any meeting place, some seats are regarded as better than others.

Matt. 23:7 Rabbi (Hb. rabbi) literally meant “my lord,” but it was used generally for outstanding teachers of the law, most frequently heads of rabbinical schools.

Matt. 23:8–10 not to be called rabbi, . . . call no man your father . . . Neither be called instructors. Jesus’ disciples should not try to gain authority over one another as teachers or masters, since Jesus is ultimately each disciple’s teacher and master (you have one teacher . . . one instructor), to whom the disciple is accountable. Jesus does not literally forbid use of the titles “teacher,” “doctor,” or “father” for all time in all circumstances, but he prohibits his disciples from using these terms in the way the Pharisees used them, in a spirit that wrongly exalted leaders and reinforced human pride.