



Tough Words from Jesus Pt 1: High Talk, Low Walk

February 5, 2023

Holy Text: Matthew 23:1-12

- Today, we enter the final chapter of our time working through Matthew (from the Sermon on the Mount up to the Olivet Discourse).
- Our purpose was to receive Kingdom encouragement and Kingdom strength from Matthew's Gospel.
- We began on July 9, 2017, and we conclude with a chapter filled with the some of the strongest words from Jesus towards His enemies contained in the Gospel accounts.
- His prophetic rebuke of the Scribes and Pharisees had been awhile in coming. Recall...

Some History of their Conflict

1. Christ's forerunner, John the Baptist, rebuked them too:
 - **Matthew 3:7-9 (KJV)** *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: 9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*
2. The Pharisees questioned our LORD's eating with sinners (Matt 9:11)
3. They accused Him of casting out devils by the prince of devils (Matt 9:34, 12:24)
4. They accused His disciples of doing "that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day." (Matt 12:2)
5. After Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, they "went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him." (Matt 12:9-14)
6. They tempted Him, asking for a sign. (Matt 12:38, 16:1)
7. They accused Jesus of transgressing the commandments of the elders (Matt 15:1-3)
8. Jesus taught His disciples to "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" which was their doctrine. (Matt 16:6,12)
9. The Pharisees attempted to trap Jesus concerning teachings about divorce. (Matt 19:1-12)
10. The Chief Priests and Scribes did not like the praise of the multitude of the disciples and children: Hosanna to the Son of David! (Matt 21:15; Lk 19:37-39)
11. The Chief Priests and elders questioned Christ's authority (Matt 21:23-27)
12. After teaching the Parable of the Two Sons and Tenants, the Chief Priests and Elders wanted to "lay hands" on Jesus but feared the people. (Matt 21:45-46)
13. The Pharisees "took counsel how they might entangle him in *his* talk" concerning paying taxes to Caesar. (Matt 22:15-22)
14. The Sadducees attempted to prove their flawed doctrine of the Resurrection when talking to Jesus. (Matt 22:23-33)
15. The Pharisees tried to trap Him concerning the great commandment of the Law and the identity of David's Son (Matt 22:34-46)

Despite these events, Jesus always knew and remained focused on His mission...

Matthew 16:21 (KJV) *From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.*

John 2:18-21 (KJV) Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? **19** Jesus answered and said unto them, *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* **20** Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? **21** But he spake of the temple of his body.

And knew the hearts of His enemies:

Matthew 9:2-4 (KJV) And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; *Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.* **3** And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. **4** And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, *Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?*

Mark 2:8 (KJV) And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, *Why reason ye these things in your hearts?*

Luke 6:7-8 (KJV) And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him. **8** But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, *Rise up, and stand forth in the midst.* And he arose and stood forth.

Applications:

1. Know your enemies!
2. Know your mission!
3. Do not let opposition stop you from obeying the Father!

Now, however, it was time that His enemies be called out directly!

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Matthew 23:1 (KJV) *Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,*

1. After all the LORD had gone through with the leaders of Israel, He turns to the crowd following Him, including the disciples, and begins to speak to them.
2. Given His subject matter, it is noteworthy that He did not say these things to His disciples only or say them in a private setting. Rather, He pronounced His condemnation upon them and their hypocrisy in public!
3. In this chapter, we see important sides of our LORD's holy character (His pastoral and prophetic sides) wherein He protects His people with passionate, polemic (strongly critical) words!
4. **Applications:**
 - Today, there is nothing more off-putting and cancel-worthy than lovingly exposing false teaching/teachers. It violates the much loved "11th Commandment": "Thou shalt be nice."
 - The New Testament paints a different picture. God commanded such be avoided. Therefore, they must be known. Let us contend for truth!

Romans 16:17 (KJV) *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.*

Ephesians 5:11 (KJV) *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*

Titus 1:10-11 (KJV) For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: **11** Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

Titus 2:15 (KJV) These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

Titus 3:9-10 (KJV) But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. **10** A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;

Matthew 23:2 (KJV) Saying, *The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:*

1. Moses was the human leader through whom God gave His Law (Ex 19-20). Therefore, the reference to Moses here is likely our LORD's acknowledgement of the authority of the spiritual leadership of Israel...those appointed to interpret and teach God's Law, as well as judge the people as Moses did. (Ex 18:26)
2. Some say Jesus meant that these men assumed too much authority, but if so, the next verse wouldn't fit.
3. **Applications:**
 - Authority, in and of itself, isn't ungodly. Indeed, all jurisdictions established by God (homes, churches, civil government) for the good of His people are given those in authority. (Eph 5; 1 Tim, 3; Rom 13)
 - Let us embrace and submit ourselves to the authority that God has put in our lives for our good!

Matthew 23:3 (KJV) *All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*

1. As King and Christ, Master and Messiah, Jesus' authority far superseded theirs. Nevertheless, He exhorted the multitude to "observe" or do what they taught.
2. Matthew Henry wrote, "*The scribes and Pharisees made it their business to study the scripture, and were well acquainted with the language, history, and customs of it, and its style and phraseology. Now Christ would have the people to make use of the helps they gave them for the understanding of the scripture, and do accordingly. As long as their comments did illustrate the text and not pervert it; did make plain, and not make void, the commandment of God; so far they must be observed and obeyed, but with caution and a judgment of discretion. Note, We must not think the worse of good truths for their being preached by bad ministers; nor of good laws for their being executed by bad magistrates. Though it is most desirable to have our food brought by angels, yet, if God send it to us by ravens, if it be good and wholesome, we must take it, and thank God for it.*"
3. There is a difference between a Holy Message and a flawed messenger! William MacDonald said, "*Generally, their teachings were dependable, but their practice was not. Their creed was better than their conduct. It was a case of **high talk and low walk.***"
4. But this verse also gives us the central message of the chapter: the religious leaders propensity to say and do not! Our LORD is again condemning their rank hypocrisy!
5. **Applications:**
 - The LORD sees the hearts and actions of those who would lead. Right words aren't enough. Right actions must follow.
 - With leadership comes tremendous responsibility and accountability before God!
 - If you lead, lead as unto the LORD.

- If you don't, pray for leaders! A few verses to consider (and tremble) if you lead:

Jeremiah 23:1-2 (KJV) *Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. 2 Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD.*

Malachi 2:1-2 (KJV) *And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. 2 If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.*

James 3:1 (KJV) *My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*

In the context of our LORD's hatred of hypocrisy (acting, pretending, and saying one thing while doing another), we find the rest of our today's Text.

Verses 4-12 are a description of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Scribes by Jesus. They are a blistering treatise on what not to do!

Matthew 23:4 (KJV) *For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.*

1. The NLT says here, "They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden."
2. The reference here likely indicts the Pharisees habit of going beyond the Law's pure teaching, and teaching as commandments the doctrines of men. Beloved, the Law of God by itself is hard enough! Regardless, they did not even obey their harsh and severe rules!
3. **Applications:**
 - Don't be a legalist. Don't go beyond Scripture. "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." (Prov 30:6)
 - Realize that obedience to God, for many, will be hard. Uphold truth but show mercy and give grace.
 - Lead by example and help others walk with God!

Matthew 23:5 (KJV) *But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,*

1. The Pharisees and Scribes loved the praise and admiration of others.
2. This flaw made them overly spiritual, taking literal a metaphor and creating an ornament for men's gaze (Ex.: Phylacteries. See Deut 6:8, 11:18) It also made them increase the size of their garment's borders, something tangible God meant to remind His people of His commandments. (Num 15:37-41)
3. **Applications:**
 - Pride can make you a men-pleaser. Humble yourself!
 - Beware of outer adornments designed to draw the eyes and adoration of people. Be modest.
 - Please God rather than men!

Matthew 23:6 (KJV) And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

1. We should emphasize that the uppermost rooms and good seats aren't in and of themselves bad. Rather, Jesus said the Pharisees "loved" them. (*phileō*)
2. In other words, they were very fond of, and likely expected, special treatment.
3. **Application:**
 - Fight against these sort of prideful impulses. Learn to take the low place. Indeed...

Luke 14:10-11 (KJV) But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. 11 For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Proverbs 25:6-7 (KJV) Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: 7 For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.

Matthew 23:7-10 (KJV) And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. 8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. 9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. 10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

1. In these verses, our LORD rebukes the sort of inappropriate and unbiblical veneration towards men that was common during the time of the Pharisees. (And still is.)
 - *Rabbi* means "Master" or "Great one." (Thayer)
 - *Father* is obviously a male parent. However, it can also mean "the originator and transmitter of anything." (Thayer)
 - *Master* in Greek means "guide" (Strong's) or "Teacher."
2. Who is the Great One? Who is the "Originator?" Who is our ultimate Guide? Even Christ!
3. Now, titles are used throughout the NT and honor is commanded towards leaders and parents (1 Tim 5:17; Eph 6:1-4). **The point is likely the heart.**
4. Christ is correcting their prideful love of being "called" by exalted titles, especially since, "all ye are brethren." Care should be taken lest we forget who the true Master, Creator, and Teacher truly is.
5. John MacArthur writes:

Here Jesus condemns pride and pretense, not titles per se. Paul repeatedly speaks of "teachers" in the church and even refers to himself as the Corinthians' "father" (1Co 4:15). Nor does this prohibition forbid the showing of respect (cf. 1Th 5:11-12; 1Ti 5:1). Christ is merely forbidding the use of such names as spiritual titles or in an ostentatious sense that gives undue spiritual authority to a human being, as if he were the source of truth rather than God.

6. **Applications:**

- God, in His mercy, set up governance and structure within spheres of authority. Therefore, respect and submission should be given to leaders, because all authority belongs to God. (Rom 13:7; Heb 13:17)
- However, there is a hard line. Those WHO lead are still just brothers with those THEY lead. Christians have ONE Master/Teacher and ONE Father!

- Spiritual Leaders especially should be mindful that their honorifics represent temporary functions; they will not stand before the LORD so titled. They should therefore never insist to be called a certain thing, considering themselves bondservants of Christ.

Matthew 23:11-12 (KJV) *But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

1. Lest the leader forget, these verses again remind them to walk in humility before the LORD. (See also Matt 20:26-27.)
2. **Applications:**
 - The “great” spiritual leader is a servant, first to God and then to God’s flock.
 - He must not seek to exalt himself. God will do that in due time. (1 Pet 5:6)
 - Rather, he must walk and talk with humility. This can be a true challenge!
 - The nature of leadership is to have authority and be “out front.” How much more then does the leader need to understand and obey our LORD’s command!
 - Leader (Parent, Boss, Pastor, Civil Magistrate, etc.), do not believe your own press! Be mindful of your own sin! Know that your role is temporary! You are just a steward for the King!

Prayers:

Father, Master, and Teacher...

Thy commands in this holy Passage prick our hearts. They show us...in us...things you detest. We are humbled.

Oh LORD, forgive us of any Pharisaical ways we have; cleanse us of such iniquity. Forgive us for loving the praise of men and exalting ourselves. Help us to be and remain humble before Thee that Thou wouldst be pleased with us.

In Jesus’ Name alone,
Amen