

18th June 2023

Jeremiah 9:23-24

²³ This is what the LORD says:

“Let not the wise boast of their wisdom
or the strong boast of their strength
or the rich boast of their riches,

²⁴ but let the one who boasts boast about this:

that they have the understanding to know me,
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,
for in these I delight,”

declares the LORD.

Matthew 23:1-12

A Warning Against Hypocrisy

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ² “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. ³ So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴ They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

⁵ “Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶ they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷ they love

to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.

⁸ "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Sermon: A Warning Against Hypocrisy (Jeremiah 9:23-24 & Matthew 23:1-12)

Please have your **Bibles** open at **Matthew 23:1-12**

You should have a **sermon outline** to take notes if you wish.

Let me **pray** first...

Intro

Whilst I was preparing this week – I came across this story of a **husband and father of three children** – who became **increasingly frustrated with his wife and family**

His **children** spent too much time **watching the Simpsons and Disney Channel on TV** – and his **wife** spent too much time **watching soap operas like Home and Away and reality TV like MasterChef and Survivor**.

He felt this was **tearing his family apart**

So, he **made up his mind –to get rid of their TV - as soon as the Football season is finished!**

(pause)

Context (Matthew 23:1-2)

Slide 1-hypocrite

Clearly the **man** was being a **hypocrite** – “*saying one thing but doing another*”
 And that’s the problem Jesus has with the teachers of the law and the Pharisees
 – **Jesus sees them as hypocrites**

We saw **last week**

Jesus fended off three questions from the religious leaders – one question
about paying tax to Caesar; one question about marriage in the resurrection
 and one question about the greatest commandment.

He then **asked the religious leaders whose son the Messiah is?**

And in a very telling way – Jesus **revealed** that **He is the Messiah** – and that the
Messiah is not just the **son of David** but also the **Son of God** – and also - David’s
Lord – and our Lord.

And in doing this, Jesus was saying – He is both **man** and **God**.

Jesus is no longer **keeping His identity under wraps** – and He is now only one
week away from His death

And here in chapter 23 – He very much **goes on the offensive** and is very
offensive to the hypocritical religious leaders – and He doesn’t **hold back**

It’s worth pointing out that the Greek word used for hypocrite in the Bible –
hypokrites – literally means an **actor playing a stage role**

And that's precisely what the religious leaders are doing – they are **acting a role to the people** – rather than being fair dinkum

We pick up the story in v1-2

Jesus is talking TO the crowds and His disciples (v1)

But He is **talking ABOUT the teachers of the law and the Pharisees (v2)** – who may even be listening to him – as we'll see next week from verse 13 onwards

And Jesus rebukes the religious leaders on 5 points – and it's worth us asking ourselves – this morning - **if we are guilty of these too.**

Let's look at each of these **problems**

They don't practice what they preach (Matthew 23:3)

Slide 2A - practice/preach

1st problem – ***the religious leaders don't practice what they preach*** – that's in verse 3

Jesus tells His listeners –

Be careful to **DO everything they TELL you**

But – **DON'T DO what they DO**

The teachers of the Law sat in **Moses' seat**.

Moses' seat -was a **special seat of honour** – sometimes inside the synagogue – and sometimes outside - where the teacher of the law sat. The **seat** was used

by the teacher of the law in authority - to **make judgments** concerning spiritual and civil matters. The teacher in reality **exercised the authority of Moses**, because Moses was regarded as the one whom the written law and the main points of the oral law had originating from (via God).

So – Jesus says what **the teachers teach in itself is fine** – but they don't practice it the way it was intended and they have corrupted it.

For example – they taught God's law said to **love your neighbour** – but they **didn't practice that** – especially when the neighbour was – **poor, disabled, a leper, a tax collector or a gentile (non-Jew)** – these types of people – the religious leaders - wrote off - as cursed by God.

But what about me - I regularly remind us to read our Bibles more often– and pray more often – but I **don't do it myself** – I get “**too busy**” – and it's not good enough – so I'm **convicted this week** – I'm a **hypocrite** – but please **do** as I **say** – **not as I do!** Please **DO** read your Bibles more and pray more!

What about us (we) – we heard last week Jesus say -**love your neighbour** – but what if our neighbour is not that nice or not that friendly – do we love them and help them? Jesus didn't say **love your nice neighbour**

What about us – we tell people we are Christians – but **do we behave like one?**

What about us – we say that we read the Bible – but do we follow what's in there?

What about us – is our behaviour on Sunday at Church the same as our behaviour at home with our family? **Would we be okay, if someone asked our family what we were like at home?**

Do WE practice what WE preach?

(pause)

They load up the people with rules (Matthew 23:4)

Slide 2b-rules

2nd problem – *the religious leaders load up the people with rules* – v4

One of my **pet hates** when driving – is the **number of changes in the speed limit**. It goes from 40 to 50 to 60 back to 50 then to 70 – then when you're on a dual carriageway where you'd think it would be 80 – it's actually 60. Unless you're super-concentrating – **it's almost impossible to keep to the legal limits** – and you're most likely breaking the law.

That's what the religious leaders had done with God's law – **they had built a fence around it.**

Here's an example – the 4th commandment says – that on the **7th day (Sabbath day) people should not work, but rest and devote the day as holy to the Lord.**

But over the centuries – Jewish oral traditions and rules were accumulated – and they were **written down in the Mishnah** (200BC)

In this Mishnah - to **clarify what “work” was** – there were **39 categories of work** – and within those categories there were **sub-categories**.

So, to follow the rule of not working on the Sabbath, there were literally **hundreds of sub-rules to follow**, including ***how many steps you can take on the Sabbath, and how many letters you can write on the Sabbath.***

You can imagine – people didn’t really have a clue what they could and couldn’t do on the Sabbath –

So, Jesus says to the religious leaders – **you’re weighing the people down with heavy, cumbersome rules** – and **you’re not helping people** – you’re **hindering people**.

Remember last week – **Jesus said the law was about LOVE** – the religious **leaders are not being loving** – instead - **they burden people!**

They see people as sinners – cursed by God – **rather than sinners who need to be saved and loved.**

If our walk with God – **drags us down** – **rather than lifting us up** – then we’re **doing something wrong.**

God’s law is meant to show us our sin – and **show us we all need a Saviour** – a **Saviour** - who doesn’t sin.

When we come to Jesus – He **offers us the complete opposite to what the religious leaders were offering** the people

Instead, Jesus offers grace. In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus says: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

Jesus says “***come***” to Him – and stay attached to Him.

Jesus is saying “***Don’t get bogged down in the rules – yes you should follow them – but you can’t do it properly – you need me***”

Jesus is saying “***I’ll take the burdens off you – all the judgmental accusations people are putting on you – all the criticism – all the guilt - all the negativity – all frustration of sinning yet again—Jesus says - I’m here with you – I’m yoked to you***”

And Jesus is saying “***stick with me – and you’ll get a rest from these burdens – and even get rest for your souls one day in Heaven***”

I hope we can see the difference between **the religious leaders’ approach** and **Jesus’ approach**?

It’s like Jesus is saying to us “***you can learn from me – you’re my apprentice – I’m not a hard-headed aggressive teacher – I’m a gentle, patience, kind teacher – who knows you’ll make mistakes – but you’ll get there in the end with Me!***”

And remember Jesus also says this in John 15:5 - “***I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing***”

For us – it **begs the question** – how are we **treating others** – are we **always pointing out their sins** – weighing them down with criticism – weighing them down with guilt – telling them off when they get it wrong - tutting and rolling

our eyes and shaking our heads at them – OR – **are we taking Jesus' approach** – getting alongside them – helping them learn from us – As the Apostle Paul puts it in Galatians 6:1 - *Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.*

They love to show off (Matthew 23:5 and Jeremiah 9:23-24)

Slide 2c-Show off

3rd problem - Jesus says the **religious leaders** - ***they love to show off*** – v5

They want everyone to see how religious and pious they are.

So, they make really wide phylacteries

Slide 3a-Phylacteries

Phylacteries are “small” **leather boxes** containing Hebrew verses and worn by Jewish men at morning prayers to **remind them to keep the Law** [taken from Deuteronomy 6:8 – where God says tie the laws as symbols to your hands and foreheads]

There is nothing wrong with wearing these phylacteries – **but they were wearing big ones so everyone could see how holy they were.** And the implication is they weren't so interested in being reminded to keep the law – but more interested in being praised by people for being super holy!

Slide 4-Tassels

Similarly – the **tassels** on their garments **were to remind them of the commands of the Lord** (Numbers 15:38-39; Deuteronomy 22:12). But the

religious leaders had **made these tassels really long – again to look super holy** – and to look better than the people!

It was all about looking good on the outside – but meanwhile on the inside – their hearts are hard – they oppress people rather than help them – they write people off rather than enable them to come to the Lord – they discourage people rather than encourage people. And they keep the letter of the law about the Sabbath not the spirit of the law and so if someone needs genuine help on the Sabbath – they refuse because they believe that helping them is actually working. Ironically though, they have **no problem in plotting to kill Jesus on the Sabbath! No wonder Jesus is cheesed with them!**

(pause)

Slide 5a-points 1, 2, 3

What about us? Are we ***guilty of showing off as Christians?***

Here's some examples

1st example - We **give some money to Missions** or **give money to help out a homeless person** – and we **tell everyone** about it.

Why does anyone need to know?

Jesus says “***don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing***”

(Matthew 6:4)

God must get the glory not us!

2nd example of showing off – We boast about - ***how wise we are*** – or ***how strong we are*** – or ***how rich we are*** – ***but our Old Testament reading from***

Jeremiah 9:23-24 says - *don't boast about ourselves – boast about the fact that we know a God who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on Earth.*

We're meant to boast about God and His Son – it's not about us!

Isn't that what our hymns are all about **praising God and His Son!**

Can we join the Apostle Paul in **Galatians 6:14** – and say:

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

3rd example of showing off – we **invite some people to church** – and they come and join us and **become Christians** – and **we boast about how we saved them!**

The Apostle Paul talks about that in 1 Corinthians 3:5-6

⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.

The Lord gets the credit – not us!

4th example of showing off – we are in a small group or Bible Study – and **we can't help sharing all our Bible knowledge** – and **fail to see that we are preventing others from sharing their insight** – or preventing others from asking a question because they begin to feel inferior or uncomfortable. We need to be mindful whether we are showing off or genuinely trying to encourage others.

We are meant to be signposts pointing people to Jesus – not pointing them to ourselves!

We are meant to practice **BEING** good – not **LOOKING** good!

They love getting honour and titles (Matthew 23:6-10)

Slide 5b-respect/titles

4th problem – The religious leaders *love getting honour and titles* – that's in vv6-10

Jesus accuses the religious leaders of loving the honour that comes with getting the best seats at banquets and at the synagogue – so that everyone can see how important they are.

And it's even better **when people stop them in the street and call them “Rabbi”** (which literally means – “honourable sir” or “great one”).

Jesus is not saying the term “rabbi” or “teacher” or “father” can't be used – but He is teaching against those who have such a great affection for titles and seeking after them and He's teaching against those who use their title to have absolute power over others!

A few years ago – I was introducing a former Moderator of the NSW Assembly to a friend – and I introduced him as “Reverend SMITH’ – and the former Moderator corrected me and said “**Actually – I’m Right Reverend SMITH!**”

I was quite disappointed that **he was so wrapped up in his title!**

Yes – it's nice if someone calls me “Reverend” – but it's nicer still if they just call me “Paul”.

Jesus' point is that we are not to call anyone "father" "rabbi" "reverend" in such a way as to give them the same spiritual authority as our Heavenly Father. We have only one spiritual Heavenly Father!

For us – it's worth asking whether the status or position we have in a ministry in our church has gone to our head – and whether - we love the accolades and praise and popularity we get in the role we have. It will surely lead to - pride and self-righteousness. Do we need to widen the door – so we can get our head in the building?

(pause)

Which bring us to the...

They misunderstood Jesus' Kingdom (Matthew 23:11-12)

Slide 5c-Kingdom

5th problem – ***the religious leaders misunderstood Jesus' Kingdom*** – that's in **vv11-12**

Here's how the **MSG version** of the Bible paraphrases v11-12

11-12 "Do you want to stand out? Then step down. Be a servant. If you puff yourself up, you'll get the wind knocked out of you. But if you're content to simply be yourself, your life will count for plenty.

Jesus is saying – His kingdom is upside-down.

To be great in His Kingdom – we have to be a servant.

Normally, people estimate greatness by how many people serve and honour them. That's how the religious leaders thought.

But Jesus says to His listeners - that in His kingdom it should be different, and that **we should estimate greatness by how we serve and honour others.**

Jesus gave a **perfect example** of this John 13:12-17.

In this passage - Jesus **washed His disciples' feet** and **set an example** for them to **follow**. It's an **example** of **servant hood**. Jesus says "***no servant is greater than the master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent Him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them***".

Jesus' point is: ***If, He, their Master and Teacher, washed their feet, they must now wash each other's feet.*** If it's good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for the disciples and good enough for us!

For us the question is are we misunderstanding Jesus' Kingdom?

A starting point might be **asking ourselves** – why we come to church?

Is it to be served – or – is it to serve?

If we come with the attitude to serve God and serve others – **we will see the need around us** – but if we come with the attitude that wants to be served – **we'll only ever see our own needs.**

That's what the **religious leaders' misunderstanding** was.

If we say we are a Christian – **then we need to go and be a Christian** – and "***wash some feet***"

If we look around us – there's **plenty of dirty feet** – **plenty of ways to serve!**

Conclusion

I'd like to leave us with the answer to - any hypocrisy – any showing off - and any thoughts of greatness.

A few years ago – I was away **on holiday** – and **pridefully** and **arrogantly** I was wondering “***how the church would survive without me being there***”

I had a **sleepless night** – and **heard a gentle voice whisper** - **John 3:30** – and I stumbled out of bed to check the verse!

Slide 6-John 3:30

And the verse - was where **John the Baptist** realizes that **Jesus is the Messiah** and Jesus’ ministry has begun – and John says “***He (Jesus) must become greater and I (John) must become less***”

I realized **God** was giving me a huge uppercut on the chin and saying “***Jesus must become greater, Paul, and you must become less – now go back to sleep and stop being a Pharisee!***”

(pause)

And it's the same for each one of us – in our lives – **Jesus must become greater** and **we must become less!**

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, please help us to examine our hearts this morning – and to repent of any hypocrisy, of any prideful showing off and of any thoughts of greatness.

Help us to look for ways to serve you and others.

Help us through your Word and your Spirit, to make Jesus the greatest in our lives – and help us to become less – trusting in Him – in all things. Amen.