

SBC – Nov. 20, 2022

Matt. 23:1-12 (NKJV)

“Jesus Exposes the Scribes & Pharisees”

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Prayer:

Slide # 1

Theme: *Christ the King*

Outline:

Chps. 1-2 The Advent of the King. (Proving His LEGAL right to the throne by His genealogy.)

Chp. 3 The Forerunner of the King and the King’s baptism.

Chp. 4 The Test of the King. (Proving His MORAL right to the throne by not yielding to temptation; and exhibiting His kingdom resume.)

Chps. 5-7 The Pronouncements of the King. (Proving His JUDICIAL right to the throne as seen in the wisdom of His kingdom teaching.)

Chps. 8-10 The Power of the King. (Proving His PROPHETICAL right to the throne by fulfilling prophecy.)

Chps. 11-12 The Rejection of the King.

Chp. 13 The Parables of the King.

Chps. 14-16 The Revelations of the King.

Chps. 17-20 The Instructions of the King.

Chps. 21-23 Formal Rejection of the King.

Chps. 24-25 The Predictions of the King.

Chps. 26-27 The Passion of the King.

Chp. 28 The Resurrection of the King.

During the last week of Christ’s earthly ministry there was a series of conflict interactions between Jesus and the religious leaders in Israel which took place on Tuesday at the Temple.

Slide # 2

Sunday

- Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem
- Jesus weeps over Jerusalem
- Jesus observes Temple Activities

Monday

- Jesus Curses Fig Tree
- Jesus Clears the Temple

Tuesday

- Jesus Explains the Withered Fig Tree
- **Temple Controversies with Religious Leaders**

The religious leaders had repeatedly tried to trip up Jesus in His words and miserably failed. Then when Jesus asked them why David in Psalm 110:1 called the Son of David his Lord they could not answer Him a word.

But Jesus was not content to just leave it there. He had more to say about and to these rebel religious leaders and it would be scathing. Matthew 23 is the Lord's last public message and it is a prolonged message of denunciation and judgment on the scribes and Pharisees – the key and most respected religious leaders in Israel. In abbreviated form the parallel passages are seen in Mark 12:38-40 and Luke 20:45-47.

Matthew 23 is the climax to the section that began in 21:23 which includes 5 hostile exchanges (21:23-27; 22:15-46) and three parables of judgment (21:28-22:14).

Slide # 3

Outline of Matthew 23

23:1-12 – Jesus Exposes the Scribes and Pharisees

23:13-36 – Seven woes of Judgment Pronounced on the Scribes and the Pharisees (vv. 13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29)

23:37-39 – The Fate of Jerusalem

Matthew 23:1–12 (NKJV)

1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples,

Jesus then addressed the crowds and His disciples about the scribes and Pharisees. This was a warning about these esteemed religious leaders who in reality were dangerous and also served as a corrective in terms of what legitimate spiritual leadership should look like.

False teachers are dangerous and are to be marked. Often, God's people say I don't want to judge and because of this they give false teachers a pass. Certainly, we don't want to judge hypocritically which is the context of "Judge not" in Matthew 7:1, but on the other hand we are to be discerning and that involves making proper judgment calls.

Slide # 4

Romans 16:17–18 (NKJV)

17 Now I urge you, brethren, **note** those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by **smooth words and flattering speech** **deceive** the hearts of the simple.

There are two areas in which a teacher can go wrong. There is orthodoxy and there is orthopraxy.

Slide # 5

Orthodoxy: Right teaching

Orthopraxy: Right living

Some teachers seem to have right teaching but they are wrong in how they live – they are hypocrites. There are others who are wrong in their teaching but seem to live upright lives. And then there are those who are wrong in both teaching and living. Sound teachers are consistently right in their teaching and they also live lives of integrity.

Jesus spoke to the multitudes and His disciples...

2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

The scribes and Pharisees claimed to be the voice of authority on the revelation of God as revealed in the Law through Moses. Thus, they claimed to be "the defenders of the faith".

Very literally it says, ***"The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in Moses' seat"***. They claimed this position for themselves, but it was not a God-ordained position. Watch out for self-made men who put them into position. They are invariably trouble!

The history of the scribes goes back to the OT days. After the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity there was a need for them to be taught the Word. Into this vacuum stepped Ezra (commonly recognized as an early scribe) and his colleagues (cf. Ezra 7; Neh. 8:1-8). From this developed an order of scribes. With the passing of time their various interpretations were chronicled in what became known as the Talmud which involved a mixture of truth and error.

An ancient Jewish saying held that God gave the law to angels, angels gave it to Moses, Moses gave it to Joshua, Joshua gave it to the elders, the elders gave it to the prophets, and the prophets gave it to the men of the synagogue who were later called scribes. Over the course of the years, those synagogue scribes became responsible not only for copying and preserving but also for teaching and interpreting God's law. – **John MacArthur**

Thus, the scribes became recognized as the authoritative teachers. By the time of the NT, the priests no longer acted as teachers because that function had been completely taken over by the scribes. They in effect were professional Bible scholars and therefore were recognized as authoritative teachers.

The Pharisees in the days of Christ numbered about 6000. While their number was relatively small their influence was great. The word Pharisee means "separated one". They took the Law seriously and sought to live accordingly – at least in terms of appearance. There was a distinction between scribes and Pharisees and yet there was overlap with many of the scribes being Pharisees.

These scribes and Pharisees as experts in and guardians of the Law saw themselves as the successors to Moses. Sitting in Moses' seat is a way of saying they saw themselves as being the successors of Moses' authority. That was a very "heady" position indeed.

Archeological finds have found that in the early synagogues there was a literal chair that is thought to have been called "the seat of Moses" from which the teachers of law sat and from that position spoke the law of God with authority.

The word "seat" is from the Greek "**kathedra**" from which we get the word cathedral which literally refers to a place or seat of authority. The Roman Catholic Pope when he speaks *ex cathedra* supposedly speaks with the authority of God. **Ex cathedra** is from the Latin and literally means "**from the chair**".

The Jews saw Moses as the supreme law giver, the one who supremely spoke for God. Therefore, to sit in **Moses' seat** was tantamount to being God's authoritative spokesman.

They saw themselves as the legal successors to Moses possessing all his authority. This was the position the scribes and Pharisees had assumed. The difference being that Moses' position was God ordained while theirs was not. They were kind of like "Moses wannabes" who in fact were usurpers. There were self-made religious authorities who claimed to speak for God.

3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.

Looking at Jesus' ministry in total we believe the sense of what Jesus was saying here was to do whatever the scribes and Pharisees said to do insofar as it properly lined up with Moses. However, we know that Jesus at great length rebuked their extra-biblical traditions as seen in Matt. 15:1-20 and 16:1-12 (also cf. Matt. 5:21-48).

And here Jesus zeros in on their hypocritical legalism where they said to do but they themselves did not do it. In effect, Jesus is saying don't follow them in their legalistic hypocrisy. "Yes, obey the Law of Moses where taught properly, but don't follow the legalism that they themselves don't even keep."

The scribes and Pharisees were guilty of preaching one thing and practicing another. That is the essence of hypocrisy. No wonder in Christ's 7-fold woe denunciation the constant refrain is, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" This was their great error! They were religious HYPOCRITES. I take it from the emphasis Jesus makes that this is most offensive to God.

This week in the news has been the big story of the implosion of **cryptocurrency** which is a digital currency. I know very little about it but what I found fascinating is the discussion that the young founder got people to buy in (pun intended) through coming off with what is termed "altruism" – which is the idea of coming off as having selfless concern for the well-being of others. The discussion I heard was that his supposed altruism cloaked in "wokeism" was totally bogus but it sucked people in. What they were saying is the guy was a totally HYPOCRITE but people bought it.

As bad as phony altruism is in the secular world there is nothing more offensive to God than religious altruism that is totally hypocritical. This defined the scribes and Pharisees generally as a group – with a few notable exceptions.

In short, the scribes and Pharisees lacked integrity. They were hypocrites who demanded of others what they could not and would not do themselves. It was all about external show and not a heart relationship with God. If one simply has an outward legalistic form of religion that doesn't really change their life – they are a religious hypocrite in the mold of the Pharisees.

Slide # 6

Matthew 5:20 (NKJV)

20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Bible says religious hypocrisy is what will define much of organized Christendom in the last days.

Slide # 7

2 Timothy 3:1–5 (NKJV)

1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:
2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,
3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,
4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

Last days perilous times are perilous because of full blown apostasy – because of huge game players who live a total double life and yet have an outward form of godliness but in practical reality deny its life changing power.

The old saying, “Your walk walks and your talk talks but your walk don't walk like your talk talks” defined the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. They were all talk and no walk! And then Jesus gets specific...

4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

Legalists are great at commanding others to do all kinds of legalistic requirements but are consistently very easy on themselves. They have two standards: One for others and another for themselves.

Legalism is harsh! It doesn't know about the "mercy rule". And frankly this spirit can easily creep into the fellowship, and it is a killer. There are two great errors – one can either be too harsh or one can be too soft.

Biblical obedience is not legalism – that is holy living according to God's Word which we are called to do. And we as God's holy family are accountable to one another. Legalism is man-made rules that supposedly make a person more holy but in truth don't. They are just man-made legalistic rules that are stifling.

The scribes and Pharisees piled up extra-biblical laws – law upon law on the shoulders of the people. For example, there were 312 pages in the Babylonian Talmud devoted to extra-biblical rules for the Sabbath. They had stipulations about blowing out a candle on the Sabbath. A person could not drag his chair any distance lest he be guilty of plowing on the Sabbath. A woman was not permitted to look in the mirror because if she saw a grey hair she would be tempted to pull it and thereby fall into sin. ***Are you feeling the weight yet?***

It was considered work to tie and undo a knot on the Sabbath. One could not sew two stitches, sow two seeds, pluck a blade of grass or pick even one piece of fruit on the Sabbath. One could not so much as clap their hands. Indeed, ***"they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear on men's shoulders"***.

It was so crazy that Alfred Edersheim (a Jewish convert to Christianity in the 1800s) aptly said, ***"Matters are seriously discussed as of vital religious importance, which one would scarcely imagine a sane intellect would seriously entertain."*** That is how crazy the Jewish legalism had become!

Legalism always claims to be well intended but it puts rules (man-made rules) above relationship. The goal of the scribes and Pharisees was supposedly to build a fence around the Law so that the people would not even come close to breaking it. How foolish! As if their man-made laws could be more effective than God's actual law or that it needed assistance.

In contrast to the spirit of scribes and Pharisees Jesus said, “**Blessed are the merciful**” (Matt. 5:7); and He told the Pharisees, “**go and learn with this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’**” (Matt. 9:13).

In contrast to the uncaring attitude of the scribes and Pharisees who burdened people down with unbearable legalistic rules and regulations is the REST that is found in Jesus.

Slide # 8

Matthew 11:28–30 (NKJV)

28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and **I will give you rest.**

29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find **rest for your souls.**

30 For My yoke is **easy** and **My burden is light.**”

The bottom line is that Pharisaic legalism doesn’t really care about people – it’s more concerned about legalistic rule keeping than people. God cares about people – not just about rules – certainly not legalistic man-made rules.

Not only were they religious hypocrites and unsympathetic legalists, but they were also all about putting on an outward show of piety to make themselves look pious.

5 But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.

They were not about humbly trying to please God, but about arrogantly putting on a show to try and impress men.

Phylacteries were little leather boxes that had verses of Scripture in them which they wore either on their left arm or attached to the front of their heads (cf. Ex. 13:1-10; 13:11-16; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21).

Slide # 9



They got this idea from such Scriptures as found in Exodus 13:9, 16; Deut. 6:8; and 11:18.

Slide # 10

Deuteronomy 11:18 (NKJV)

18 “Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and **bind them as a sign on your hand**, and **they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.**

Originally, the Jews understood this binding on the hand and on the forehead was not to be taken literally, but symbolically. They understood that the law was to be in their heart so intently so as to be the controlling factor of their lives. It was to control them not only in what they did (represented by the hand) but also in what they thought (represented by the forehead). **“Both their thoughts and their actions were to be directed by God’s Word.”** (John MacArthur)

But somewhere they had externalized what God had intended for them to apply in a spiritual sense. For some reason people tend to do this. The Church has done this with baptism. It has a beautiful symbolic meaning, but many have externalized it making the outward ritual the essence, when in reality it merely portrays spiritual reality. We have the same thing in communion. The cup and the bread merely portray the body and blood of Christ; they are not the real thing. There are many such things in the Scriptures.

Slide # 11

John 6:63 (NKJV)

63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. **The words that I speak to you are spirit**, and they are life.

Someone once asked the question: ***Should we take the Bible literally or spiritually?*** The answer came back: We should take the literal parts literally and we should take the spiritual parts spiritually. That is the right answer. It is what rightly dividing the Word is all about (2 Tim. 2:15). We often say, “When plain sense makes plain sense then seek no other sense”. But when it doesn’t make sense then we need to consider that perhaps it should be taken metaphorically or symbolically.

We constantly do this in everyday language and immediately understand the sense of what is being said.

If I say, “The plants in our house are begging to be watered” you immediately understand they are not literally begging to be watered but rather that they are in desperate need of being watered.

When we say we interpret the Bible literally it is better to say we interpret it normally which allows for metaphorical language and figures of speech just like we commonly use in our normal communication.

The Jews should have known this from the OT Scriptures which made it obvious that this language of binding God’s Word on the physical body was really a symbolic way of saying it should be held close in your heart.

Slide # 12

Proverbs 3:3 (NKJV)

3 Let not mercy and truth forsake you; **Bind them around your neck**, Write them on the tablet of your heart,

Proverbs 6:21 (NKJV)

21 Bind them continually upon your heart; **Tie them around your neck**.

Proverbs 7:3 (NKJV)

3 Bind them on your fingers; Write them on the tablet of your heart.

These legalistic Jews had lost sight of the “spirit” of what was being said and turned it into merely outward legalistic religion. And they did it in a self-serving way intended to promote self-righteousness. They made their phylacteries extra large to draw attention to their piety and they enlarged the borders of their garments for the same reason.

The borders of their garments are thought to refer to the blue threaded tassels that God commanded for the Jews to wear on the corners of their garments as seen in Numbers 15:37-41 and Deut. 22:12. These tassels were to remind them that they were to be a holy people set apart to do the commandments of the Lord.

Slide # 13



In Jesus day most all the Jews had these tassels on the edge of their garments including Jesus. One of these tassels was undoubtedly the hem of Jesus' garment that the woman touched in Matt. 9:20 (cf. 14:36).

But again, these religious legalists missed the point. These tassels were not for show but rather were to serve as a reminder to the wearer of their holy calling. Instead, the scribes and Pharisees enlarged their borders in such a way as to draw attention to themselves to make them look more spiritual. It was all about SELF!

Christ criticizes not the custom itself but the wrong spirit that corrupted it. – **Charles Ryrie**

6 They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues,

These religious people were totally self-centered and all about self-serving. They thought only of SELF! In a word they were SELFISH!

When people use spiritual positions for self-serving reasons of self-promotion, power, and prestige you can be certain they are completely on the wrong track (cf. Lk. 14:8-10; Ja. 2:2-3). They were not there to serve but rather to be served! Again, for them it was all about self! They in effect were religious narcissists – that is they had an inflated view of self-importance and made it all about SELF!

They wanted to be the center of attention and were characterized by a total lack of true humility. They considered themselves to be the VIPs and wanted everyone around them to know it too. Nothing but the BEST for them – the best places – the best seats – it was all about their own self-interests – their own self-importance.

7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'

Being self-centered they loved the special greetings extended to them in the marketplaces. They relished people fawning over them saying, "Rabbi, Rabbi".

The word "Rabbi" had the meaning of "my teacher" or "my master" and came to have the nuance of "my great one". Such a greeting reflected special homage being paid to a person. It stroked their ego, and they loved it. Thus, Rabbis were viewed as wise and superior as spiritual guides.

To recognize someone as Rabbi was to almost reverence them. As their disciple one would obey them without question. One would never walk in front or beside them – always behind them. The title “Rabbi” definitely exuded an exalted status of special greatness – really an exalted reverence that should be given only to God.

8 But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.

The issue here is the spirit of things. Jesus is not saying there is no place for the role of teacher among God’s people, because we know the NT plainly teaches that God has given teachers to the church (Acts 13:1; Ja. 3:1; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11).

The problem here was that the “Rabbis” had an exalted view of self that really put them in a position of superiority that belongs to Christ alone as the SUPRME EXALTED TEACHER Who is above all. As God’s people we are all equally sheep. We are all learning. There is no ONE supremely above all the others. We are all brothers and sisters. There is to be no air of inherent superiority.

According to the Talmud (Sanhedrin, 88b) it was more punishable to act against the words of the scribes than to act against the words of Scripture. (Source MacArthur’s Commentary on Matthew, p. 366) That is putting the Scribe up way too high. That really puts him in a higher position than God.

Slide # 14

John 13:13 (NKJV)

13 You call Me Teacher and Lord, [Master] and you say well, for so I am.

Jesus as Lord, ALONE, is THE Master Teacher! He is a class all His own. We all sit at His feet. Now yes, He uses gifted teachers, but we are to be humble and not have an overly exalted view of any other teacher because we are all brethren. “Brethren” signifies equality.

This was one of the MAJOR reforms that came out of the reformation – the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers instead of just a clergy class of priests. Yes, there are differing God ordained roles and we are gifted differently, and yet as Paul says we are “*all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal. 3:28). There is no place for a “more important than you” attitude in the body. We are all brethren. We are all spiritual equals. There are no spiritual superiors!

9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

Again, the nuance of what Jesus was saying is that as mere humans no one should assume the position that belongs to Father God alone. Don't play God! As leaders don't play God. We constantly need to recognize the truth that there is a God, and we are not Him!

Jesus is speaking in the sense of spiritual Father Who has the superior position over the family of God. This is the position of Father God ALONE!

Yes, we have human fathers and it is appropriate to recognize them as such. It's okay to have "Father's Day". Paul spoke of himself as a spiritual father (in the sense of a small "f" father) to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 4:15. He spoke of Timothy as being his "son" in the Lord (1 Cor. 4:17). In 1 John 2 the apostle John addressed "fathers". So there is a proper place to think in terms of people as a "father" but in the spiritual sense of superior over the family of God – that belongs to God ALONE.

Slide # 15

Terms have both a generic meaning and a specialized meaning in particular contexts (such as "apostle," "deacon," "elder," and here "teacher" and "father"). -**Ed Glasscock**

For a clergy person to assume the title spiritual "father" over God's people in the sense of being a spiritual superior is unbiblical and runs contrary to what Christ taught us here. For the Pope to have the title "**Holy Father**" is blasphemous. In the Scriptures "Holy Father" is a title used only for God the Father and that only once as found in John 17:11.

Self-exalting titles that make one out to be a spiritual superior that in reality belongs to God alone is totally inappropriate.

10 And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.

The word "teacher" here in verse 10 is a different Greek word than that which is found in verse 8. The word "teacher" here in verse 10 more literally means "leader" or "guide".

Again, God has given leaders to the Church, but they must always realize they are merely under-leaders – undershepherds.

One ALONE, namely the Christ is the supreme GUIDE over all. He ALONE is the chief shepherd (cf. 1 Peter. 5:4).

The issue throughout here is the issue of supremacy! That belongs to God alone! Spiritual leaders are to have a humble view of themselves – not an exalted or superior view.

God has placed spiritual leaders in the church, but they must not replace God in our lives. – **Warren Wiersbe**

The issue in question here is not merely a matter of titles but the spirit of self-seeking glory that is behind it. I never take for myself the title “**Reverend**” because there is nothing to reverence about me. The word “Reverend” is found only once in the Bible as found in the King James translation of Psalm 111:9 and there it is applied only to God!

However, there is a place for the use of proper titles in a functional sense. There is a place for proper respect but not for reverence. There is a line there. As Paul says in Romans 13:7, “respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due”. In 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 13 Paul exhorts the brethren to recognize those who are over them in the Lord and to esteem them very highly in love. That is proper. So yes, proper recognition and respect, but not reverence.

Slide # 16

This is not an absolute prohibiting of officials nor the use of appropriate titles, for Paul calls himself “father” of the Corinthians and Timothy his “child” (1 Cor. 4:15, 17). But a spirit of humility should govern believers, not the self-seeking ambition of the Pharisees, which usurped for itself authority that belongs to God. – **Wycliffe Bible Commentary**

In terms of personal application, I am often called “pastor” and in the right spirit of things I am okay with that because that is my functional position, but it does not make me spiritually superior in any way.

In Ephesians 4 Paul is addressing truths that relate to the universal Church which is the basic theme of the entire epistle. In that context he says that God has given to the Church certain gifted men that are referred to as “pastor-teachers”.

In context, the pastor-teacher emphasis relates to uniquely gifted PEOPLE Christ has given to the church. It's not merely talking about an OFFICE in this context, but rather about specific gifted PEOPLE given to the Church to function in a specialized role.

Harold Hoehner makes a major point in saying that "the term 'office' is never used in the NT in connection with the gifts" saying, "Those who were selected to any offices were either appointed (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) or elected by people based on qualifications (Acts 1:26; 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:1-13) whereas the gifts are sovereignly bestowed by God (Eph. 4:7; 1 Cor. 12:7, 11; Rom. 12:4)." Of special note is that Eph. 4:11 has gifted persons (pastor-teachers) in view and not that of the office of elder/bishop.

The OFFICE of elder is never referenced in terms of being a gift. One is appointed to the office of elder on the basis of Biblical qualifications and not merely giftedness (cf. Acts 14:23, 1 Tim. 5:22, Titus 1:5). All elders will be gifted and have the ability to teach, and all share in the shepherding responsibility (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2; 1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:9), but not all will be **equally** gifted as pastor-teachers in the sense of Eph. 4:11 which refers to specific gifted persons that are uniquely gifted and given by Christ to the church with special Word-based ministries. Paul also mentions those among the elders worthy of double honor who are especially given over to labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17).

I would see the specialized calling of pastor-teacher in Ephesians 4:11 as closely related to the 7 messengers to the 7 churches in the book of Revelation as seen in Rev. 1-3.

All this to say that there are specific offices, callings, and roles as laid out in the NT Scriptures and it is not inappropriate to properly designate such people in a functional way. And yet, I wouldn't go too far with this. I have the functional title "**pastor**" (as in pastor-teacher) but I don't insist on being called anything special. I am just a brother in a stewardship role (cf. 1 Pet. 4:10-11). I often say that I am "**just the delivery boy**" serving as a God-ordained messenger to the Church.

These messengers are said three times in Rev 1-2 to be in the special place of being held in Christ's right hand (Rev. 1:16, 20; 2:1) but in and of themselves they are nothing. The entire surrounding focal point of emphasis is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself which is where the focal point of emphasis is always to be. As I often say, "**It's all about Jesus!**" In contrast the scribes and Pharisees made it all about THEM!

Slide # 17**Matthew 23:1-10
Scribes & Pharisees Characterized**

- v. 2 – Self-made
- v. 3 – Hypocrites
- v. 4 -Legalistic/Unmerciful
- v. 5 – Piously Self-Promoting
- v. 6 – Selfish
- v. 7-10 – Self-Exalting

And then Jesus makes this application...

11 But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.

The scribes and Pharisees wanted to be counted as the greatest in a self-promoting sort of way, but Jesus turns that on its head and says that the greatest among His disciples will be the one in the role of SERVANT! That was radically opposite of what these religious leaders were all about.

Leadership positions should never be a goal in and of themselves, but should always be viewed as opportunities to serve others.

– ***The Bible Knowledge Commentary***

By the way we don't always have to make it known how we are serving in this way or that way. Just humbly going about it and not drawing attention to ourselves is really in keeping with the spirit of Christ-like humility.

There are always more opportunities for humble service. If one has to have a position in which to serve, they probably are out of sync with true humble service. True servants don't vie for position or status they just serve! This demonstrates true GREATNESS before God. True greatness stoops to serve and doesn't draw attention to itself in the process.

And then to drive the point home Jesus says...

12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Pride goes before destruction (Prov. 16:18). Those that exalt themselves are on the way down – its just a matter of when and how. Religious leaders like the Pharisees exalted themselves but ultimately all who do so will be humbled in the worst sort of way.

In contrast those who humble themselves will in the end be exalted. Peter wrote to the suffering saints...

Slide # 18

1 Peter 5:5–6 (NKJV)

5 ... Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and **be clothed with humility**, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”

6 Therefore **humble yourselves** under the mighty hand of God, **that He may exalt you in due time**,

God is the one who exalts. It's not about exalting self but rather about humbling ourselves down before God. And as we do so we can be sure that in the end God will exalt us.

Slide # 19

Scribes & Pharisees

Christ's Disciples

Pride

Humility

SELF-ORIENTED

GOD-ORIENTED/OTHER SERVING

John the Baptist said, “***He must increase, but I must decrease.***” (Jn. 3:30). That is a motto of kingdom greatness!

We often talk about “the great apostle Paul” but he never spoke of himself in those terms. In fact, the more he matured the less he seemed to think of himself.

Slide # 20

1 Corinthians 15:9 (NKJV)

9 For I am **the least of the apostles**, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Ephesians 3:8 (NKJV)

8 To me, who am **less than the least of all the saints**, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

1 Timothy 1:15 (NKJV)

15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save **sinners, of whom I am chief.**

I would say that God thoroughly worked humility in the life of Paul, and this is indicative of true greatness before God.

They say that if you see a turtle on top of a fence post you know that it didn't get there by itself! How true! We are not self-made people. Paul asked the Corinthians, "And what do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). The answer of course is "NOTHING!"

We have much to be thankful for because God has given us MUCH! We have no room to boast because all is a gift from God. Humility makes much out of God and not self!

Slide # 21



At the most basic level, the Bible defines humility as God-centeredness and pride as self-centeredness. – **J. Lanier Burns**

The great issue in life is this: What defines us? Is it self-centeredness or is it God-centeredness? In the end this tells the whole story on everyone!

God help us to be God-centered and other serving.

It's not about us – it's all about Him!