

**The Final Week (Tuesday):  
Jesus' Denunciation of the Pharisees**  
*Looking into the Face of Jesus*  
*The Life of Christ, 2: Pages 303-314*  
**Manuscript: Lesson Plan 95**

**Introduction**

The texts for this lesson are Matthew 23:1-39; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47. We will be reading from Matthew 23 in a moment.

This address by Jesus was directed both to the crowds and to the disciples. It was His last address to the crowds in Matthew's Gospel. The Pharisees were the main teachers of the people. While there were some good Pharisees, most of them needed corrections.

This sermon was Jesus' sharpest denunciation of them; the focus of this address was their hypocrisy. Scribes and Pharisees are not mutually exclusive terms, for most scribes were also Pharisees. The function of the scribe (called by Josephus) was to expound the law.

Jesus' first words, addressed to the crowds, was a warning about the religious leaders . . .

**"Do Not as They Do" (Matthew 23:1-7)**

Let us take a look at Matthew 23:1-7 (read).

To sit on Moses' seat means that they were the authoritative teachers of Moses' law. As the authoritative teachers of the law, their teaching was to be followed. It is obvious that this commendation that Jesus gave was limited to the truths they taught. Jesus had often warned against their false teaching (Matthew 5:17-44; 12:1-8; 15:1-20; 19:1-12). The major fault of the Pharisees, however, was their failure to practice what they taught (see Matthew 21:30; Romans 2:21). In other words, they were hypocrites.

They would lay on the shoulders of others numerous commandments to keep, but they themselves would not lift a finger to keep them. They did what they did to be seen of men. They enjoyed receiving the places of honor and the special seats in synagogues. They loved to be noticed for their spirituality, and they loved for men to praise them.

Jesus then answers a related question.

**How Are We to Address One Another (Matthew 23:8-12)?**

Look at Matthew 23:8-12 (read).

We need to understand the religious titles claimed by the religious leaders. The loved to be called Rabbi by men. This term, meaning "my teacher," was likely just coming into use in the first century as an honorary title. They also enjoyed being called father. The spiritual use of this term is reserved for the Father in heaven. "Leader" (some versions have "master" or "teacher") was another coveted title. This Greek word is used only here in the NT. It is, however, found in the papyri for a teacher. The title is to be reserved for Christ.

"But the greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11) repeats the statement of Matthew 20:26. The measure of greatness in the kingdom is not

see in the titles worn but is to be found in the rendering of service (cf. Matthew 18:1ff.).  
Jesus now turns His attention to the scribes and Pharisees.

### The Seven (or Eight) Woes to the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:13-36; Luke 11:37-52)

The first woe is found in Matthew 23:13 (read). The first accusation is that they were stumbling blocks. Their many rules either made men refuse the demands or made them unable to keep the demands. However, they, themselves also did not keep them.

The second woe is found in Matthew 23:14 (read). Is Matthew 23:14 another woe? If this is part of the text, it would make eight woes. Some manuscripts have this saying before Matthew 23:14. It is present in KJV, but it is judged by modern textual experts to be insufficiently supported by textual evidence, and for that reason is relegated to the footnotes (but Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47 suggest that it should be included). They would pray long prayers but they would turn around and mistreat a widow.

We see the third woe in Matthew 23:14, 15 (read). In this accusation, He charged the Pharisees with excessive zeal in proselytism. "Twice as much" points to the tendency in any system for the disciple to go further than his teacher would. One persuaded to change his religion also becomes more zealous for his new religion than he was for his former one.

The fourth woe can be found in Matthew 23:16-22 (read). This accusation, unique in using the epithet "blind guides" (cf. Matthew 15:14) rather than in naming the scribes and Pharisees, is against the practice of making distinctions in oaths where there is no difference. The reasoning behind these distinctions is hypocritical and evil. Jesus accused them of being "blind men"—men unable to see the incongruity of their reasoning.

The fifth woe we see in Matthew 23:23, 24 (read). These were small garden herbs of little value. However, according to the rabbis, these were subject to the tithing law that specified "the increase of your seed" (Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:6f.; Matthew 14:22f.). They should have been out a concerned about "weightier provisions of the Law" as well. They strained out a gnat (the smallest of unclean animals) and swallowed a camel (one of the largest unclean animals).

The sixth woe is in Matthew 23:25, 26 (read). They went to great effort to always be ritually clean. Vessels had to be washed carefully to conform to the needs of ritual purity (Mark 7:4). A clean outside of the cup, though, does not mean the inside is clean. But if your "cup" is clean inside, the outside will automatically be clean (we are talking about hearts and lives, not literal dishes).

The seventh woe we read in Matthew 23:27, 28 (read). To enable men to avoid contracting uncleanness by touching a grave (cf. Numbers 19:16), it was the custom to whitewash the exterior of graves. Though appearing righteous, the Pharisees and scribes are said to be "full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." Elsewhere, we meet the figure of whitewashed walls (Ezekiel 13:10; Acts 23:3).

The eighth woe is found in Matthew 23:29-36 (read). This final accusation in the series charges that while outwardly honoring the prophets, and while appearing to disown the actions of their predecessors, the Pharisees were actually no better than their ancestors who martyred the prophets. They condemned their

predecessors, but then would do a like act in arguing for the death of Jesus. They would continue to persecute those sent after Jesus. Upon them would fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth.

**Conclusion**

God hates hypocrisy. The Greek word for hypocrite is used of a stage actor. In other words, it is someone who pretends to be something he or she is not. Each of us needs to examine his or her own heart.  
God requires faith. Each of us ought to say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," and mean it.  
God urges obedience. Notice the lamentation in Matthew 23:37-39 (read).  
May we respond at once so that it is never said of us that we were unwilling to be gathered when Jesus called.

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