

## Lesson 3 – 14 November 2010.

### The King Confronts the Scribes and Pharisees.

**Lesson Scope:** [Matthew 15:1-20; 16:1-12; 19:1-12, 22:15-46; 23](#)

#### Lesson Focus

This lesson looks at the self-indulgent nature of men and the downward course that inevitably leads them on. Approach the negative content of this lesson with a positive outlook. By studying the negative attributes inherent in each of us, we are better able to identify weaknesses so that the Lord might purge us from them. The lesson shows how our fallen human nature can lead an individual—or an entire group—astray.

Jesus faced opposition from three distinct groups: the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. The verbal exchanges in the lesson scope occurred between Jesus and His opponents in the presence of His disciples and the people. His teachings and actions drew the full attention of the Jewish leaders. They were confronted with the same question every person must face today—"What will you do with Jesus?"

The scribes attempted to ensnare Him with legalistic interpretations of the Law; the Pharisees could not hear the loss of their wrong traditions; and the Sadducees could not find His name in the Decalogue. For these reasons, they rejected Jesus, His authority, and His miracles. Jesus faced bitter opposition from self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. Their man-made doctrines blinded their eyes to the truth.

**Lesson Aim:** To expose fallacies of self-righteousness.

**Theme Verse:** [Romans 10:3](#). For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

#### Lesson Text.

##### Vain Worship

[Matthew 15:3-9](#)

But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? <sup>4</sup>For God commanded, saying,

Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. <sup>5</sup>But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; <sup>6</sup>And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. <sup>7</sup>Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, <sup>8</sup>This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. <sup>9</sup>But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

### **Willful Ignorance.**

[Matthew 22:23-29](#)

The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, <sup>24</sup>Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. <sup>25</sup>Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: <sup>26</sup>Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. <sup>27</sup>And last of all the woman died also. <sup>28</sup>Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

### **Blind Leadership**

[Matthew 23:13-15](#)

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. <sup>14</sup>Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. <sup>15</sup>Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

[Matthew 23:23-26](#)

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. <sup>24</sup>Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. <sup>25</sup>Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of

extortion and excess. <sup>26</sup>Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

### **Utter Desolation**

[Matthew 23:29-33](#)

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, <sup>30</sup>And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. <sup>31</sup>Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. <sup>32</sup>Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. <sup>33</sup>Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

[Matthew 23:37-38](#)

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! <sup>38</sup>Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **Vain Worship**

1. What was the fundamental difference between the Jewish traditions in Matthew 15:5 and God's command in Matthew 15:6?
2. Describe the worship that God accepts.

#### **Willful Ignorance**

3. How does a self-righteous attitude lead to ignorance?
4. How can we gain a proper understanding of the Scriptures?

#### **Blind Leadership**

5. In what ways were the scribes and Pharisees misleading their people?
6. What traits mark religious hypocrites?

#### **Utter Desolation**

7. In what ways were the Jewish leaders deluded?
8. What is the remedy for self-righteousness and hypocrisy?

### **Analyzing the Passage**

Three groups in the Jewish leadership opposed Jesus. We will look briefly at each.

The scribes were essentially lawyers who devoted themselves to the study of both secular and sacred law. They made interpretation based on

their study. The decisions of the more noteworthy scribes became part of Jewish law. They were masters of the Law who often taught others.

The Pharisees originated as a fundamentalist response to Hellenism. They promoted a strict adherence to Mosaic Law. Their basic beliefs included the existence of an immortal soul, the resurrection of the body, the existence of spirits, eternal punishment for wickedness, and eternal reward for righteousness.

The Sadducees were well placed in society, having wealth and political influence. Many of the priests of Jesus' day were Sadducees. They rejected the concept of resurrection and eternal punishment, as well as the existence of angels and spirits.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Vain Worship**

1. The self-righteous want to appear good, but their hearts are corrupt (Matthew 15:3, 5-9). They believe that their own standard of conduct is superior. They give lip service to some right things in an effort to appear righteous. But underneath lie interests and motives that are self-serving and evil. God is never deceived by hypocritical words and actions.

### **Willful Ignorance**

2. The self-righteous ignore plain Scriptural teaching in favor of humanistic reasoning (Matthew 22:23, 25-29). The Sadducees had departed from sound teaching by mixing Greek philosophy into their thinking. They refused to accept what did not fit their earthly viewpoint.

Many man-made philosophies and teachings surround us today. We must carefully adhere to the Scriptures so that we are not deceived. The Lord gives sufficient grace to those who seek His way with a true heart.

### **Blind Leadership**

3. The self-righteous are a stumbling block to true seekers (Matthew 23:13). How many people have turned from God because of "too many hypocrites in the church!" Such statements are often an excuse, but the fact remains that inconsistent living on the part of professing Christians has discouraged many true seekers. How different is the influence of those who consistently demonstrate the humility and love of Christ!

4. Self-righteous efforts are doomed to fail, efforts at human betterment are doomed to fail (Matthew 23:15). Lost men cannot possibly lead others to eternal life. Humanistic efforts at improving society cannot succeed, be-

cause the sin factor is still at work. Apart from regeneration, all other changes are temporary and insufficient. God is the only source of power for inner cleansing and Spiritual life.

5. The self-righteous are careful in details, while neglecting the things of greatest importance (Matthew 23:23-24). By creating a distraction elsewhere, they are able to divert attention from their shortcomings. But God sees all. He offers mercy to those who repent, but judgement awaits those who continue in their complacent course.

6. The self-righteous will always fail the tests that try the heart (Matthew 23:25, 26). True character resides in the heart, not in outward appearance. Only a heart purified by the work of our Lord can pass the spiritual tests of life. The self-righteous heart is ill-prepared for such tests; they reveal its poverty.

7. The self-righteous are completely unrealistic ill assessing their own motives (Matthew 23:29-30). Self-righteousness blinds a man to himself. He rationalizes his actions, comparing them to those of other men. He bolsters his sense of superiority by comparing himself to people in the past and claiming better knowledge than what they had. He relies on the statements of other men without testing them against the standard of truth.

#### **Utter Desolation**

8. The self-righteous are on a collision course with God's judgment (Matthew 23:31-33). The Jews had killed generation after generation of God's faithful witnesses. Now they were boldly opposing the Son of God Himself. In spite of His obvious authority and His many miracles, they persisted in their ways. Jesus warned them in the strongest possible terms.

9. The self-righteous violently reject their only hope (Matthew 23:37-38). The Jewish leaders could not abide Christ in their midst, so they seized Him, condemned Him, and demanded His crucifixion. They were willingly blind to the fact that He was their only means of salvation. Men through the ages have continued on the same Course, violently rejecting the Gospel and those who live by it. As the list of martyrs grows so does the great Cloud of witnesses. Let us each continue faithful to the end.

#### **Important Teachings**

1. The self-righteous want to appear good, but their hearts are corrupt (Matthew 15:3, 5-9).

2. The self-righteous ignore plain Scriptural teaching in favor of humanis-

tic reasoning (Matthew 22:23, 25-29).

3. The self-righteous are a stumbling block to true seekers (Matthew 23:13).

4. Self-righteous efforts at human betterment are doomed to fail (Matthew 23:15).

5. The self-righteous are careful in details, while neglecting the things of greatest importance (Matthew 23:23-24).

6. The self-righteous will always fail the tests that try the heart (Matthew 23:25-26).

7. The self-righteous are completely unrealistic in assessing their own motives (Matthew 23:29-30).

8. The self-righteous are on a collision course with God's judgment (Matthew 23:31-33).

9. The self-righteous violently reject their only hope (Matthew 23:37-38).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. What was the fundamental difference between the Jewish tradition in Matthew 15:5 and God's command in Matthew 15:6?

The Jewish tradition made a pretense of placing God first, when actually it was an effort to avoid God-given responsibility. It required right-sounding words when the heart was self-willed and disobedient. God's command required the combination of right attitudes and right deeds.

2. Describe the worship that God accepts.

Proper worship includes an attitude of reverence along with words of praise to God. God accepts such expressions when they come from a heart that is humble, sincere, and submissive.

3. How does a self-righteous attitude lead to ignorance?

Self-righteous attitudes lead to ignorance because the self-righteous do not wish to acknowledge anything that reflects against their "righteous" reputation. They reject truth because it condemns their sinful course.

4. How can we gain a proper understanding of the Scriptures?

God has given us His Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth (John 16:13). He will illuminate us as we have a teachable spirit, studying the Bible diligently and prayerfully comparing Scripture with Scripture. We must be open to benefit from the understanding of other believers.

5. In what ways were the scribes and Pharisees misleading their people?

By opposing Jesus, they influenced many of the people to reject their Mes-

siah. They gave a lot of attention to details, while omitting more important things. They wished to project an image of holiness, but they were actually corrupt.

6. What traits mark religious hypocrites?

The hypocrite's life and practice place a stumbling block before others (Matthew 23:13). He majors in minors and neglects the things of greater importance (Matthew 22:23-24). He is more concerned about his reputation than about his character. He expects a higher standard of others than he is willing to meet.

7. In what ways were the Jewish leaders deluded?

They condemned the sins of their fathers, but they did the same things themselves. They honored the prophets and righteous who were dead, but they denounced Jesus and other godly people who were living. They felt superior to their fathers, but they were following in similar or even greater sins.

8. What is the remedy for self-righteousness and hypocrisy?

Jesus is the remedy. All must come to Him in humility and repentance to receive His forgiveness and cleansing. He offers and longs to give the security typified by the hen sheltering her brood.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

While many of the basic things that the Jewish leaders promoted were not wrong in themselves, they had allowed their focus to shift from God to themselves. Tradition, orderliness, and knowledge are all sought by God's people today, but it is important that God be kept central in our life and worship. History abounds with examples of those who came to a miserable end when they lost sight of God. The illustrations in today's lesson should motivate each of us to more fully commit our own pursuits to the Lord for His honor and glory.

### **Research Guide**

1. Read the entire lesson scope as well as the parallel accounts in Mark 12 and Luke 20.
2. Read Daniel 4 for the encounter between self-righteous Nebuchadnezzar and the holy God.