

## **“Humility in the Light of His Glory”** **The Gospel of Matthew 23:1-12**

**SONG SETUP: *Lord I Need You*** – “Lord, I need you ... my one defense, my righteousness.  
Oh God, how I need you!” Matt Maher, Kristian Stanfill, et. al

### **INTRODUCTION**

These words set up so perfectly the conclusion I hope to draw from our scripture text today – that our need for eternal hope and righteous acceptance with a holy God and salvation from *self*-righteousness are all found in Christ. In the light of His authority and glory and grace our most sincere response must be one of awe and humility and surrender. I’m reminded of the Gospel hymn that many of you grew up singing,

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus;  
look full in His wonderful face  
and the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
in the light of His glory and grace.”

Ironically, Helen Howarth Lemmel penned those words after some measure of artistic acclaim as a music critic and soloist had faded, after her marriage to a wealthy European businessman had failed and after she had lost her sight. Imagine! “Turn your eyes upon Jesus,” the spiritual exhortation from an blind woman to see Christ clearly. She was inspired to write the hymn text at the age of 55 upon reading a missionary pamphlet entitled *Focused* by Liliias Trotter who, herself, had been compelled to abandon a fledgling artistic career to commit her life to missions. Trotter authored several books and tracts other than the source of Lemmel’s inspiration. A separate by thematically similar pamphlet entitled, “Which Passion Will Prevail?” challenges the believe to consider all the things they might worship to the exclusion of the Lord they have been called to serve with fidelity and fervor. Hear these words as an admonition to your wayward affections.

"Never has it been so easy to live in half a dozen harmless worlds at once—art, music, social science, games, ... the following of some profession, and so on. And between them we run the risk of drifting about—the good hiding the best." It is easy to find out whether our lives are focused, and if so, where the focus lies. Where do our thoughts settle when consciousness comes back in the morning? Where do they swing back when the pressure is off during the day? Dare to have it out with God, and ask Him to show you whether or not all is focused on Christ and His Glory. Turn your soul's vision to Jesus, and look and look at Him, and a strange dimness will come over all that is apart from Him." Liliias Trotter

[www.sharefaith.com/guide/Christian-Music/hymns-the-songs-and-the-stories/turn-your-eyes-upon-jesus](http://www.sharefaith.com/guide/Christian-Music/hymns-the-songs-and-the-stories/turn-your-eyes-upon-jesus)

Last week we considered the authority of Jesus and our ultimate devotion to His lordship in the question: “Whose Son in the Christ?” This question, posed by the Pharisees, became the basis for Christ’s closing argument in a defense that Jesus began in Matthew 21:12 following his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus immediately followed his celebrative reception into the city by going on a rampage through the outer courts of the temple that were cluttered with the filth and clamor of animal-keepers and money-changers. “My house shall be called a house of prayer, but *you* make it a den of robbers!” Obviously his actions elicited a response from the chief priests and scribes who denounced his behavior. It is telling, however, that it was His healing of the crowds and the children crying out, “Hosanna to the Son of David” *within the temple courts* with which the chief-priests took issue, not the mayhem He had brought to the temple courts with his own hands.

Even from the outset of the character defense in which He was engaged from Matthew 21:12 – 23:12, it was Jesus’ understanding of His identity and His followers’ burgeoning confidence in His rightful authority as the Messiah that was the issue of contention with the chief priests and Pharisees. They hated him for the threat He posed to their authority and the confidence He possessed in His identity as Messiah. You will recall from the sermon last Sunday:

- Jesus affirmed the Christ was the Son of David
- Jesus affirmed that David saw his son becoming greater than himself; calling him *Adonai* –“Lord”
- Jesus affirmed that David understood the descendant of whom he spoke in Psalm 110 to be the Messiah, for YAHWEH said to Him: “Sit at my right hand until I put [all] your enemies under your feet.”
- Jesus healed those who called out to Him: “Son of David, have mercy!” Matt 9:27, 15:22, 20:30f
- Jesus received the praise of crowds that called him “the Son of David” at his triumphal entry
- Jesus refused to acknowledge the chief priests who questioned the authority by which he healed AND taught *in the temple* on the day of his revolutionary parade into Jerusalem; conclusion being:
- Jesus claimed the title and authority of “the Son of David”; He was confident He was the Christ

**I aim to make clear the following conclusion from our text today: our confidence in Christ’s rightful authority as Messiah and Savior, should compel us to abandon religious hypocrisy and humble ourselves in service to one another and Him. He will direct, indwell and exalt those whose hope is in Him.**

### SERMON TEXT

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, <sup>2</sup> “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, <sup>3</sup> so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. <sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. <sup>5</sup> They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, <sup>6</sup> and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues <sup>7</sup> and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. <sup>8</sup> But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. <sup>9</sup> And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. <sup>10</sup> Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. <sup>11</sup> The greatest among you shall be your servant. <sup>12</sup> Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. **Matthew 23:1-12 (ESV)**

### PRAYER

### SERMON OUTLINE

#### I. Ultimate Authority

We have established the basis upon which Jesus claimed and we may believe that He is the Messiah:

- A. Son of David** – in fulfillment of all the prophecies about Him culminating in His triumphal entry
- B. Sovereign** – that is King of *all* kings under whose feet every enemy will be subjected (Psalm 110)
- C. Savior** – the One who has responded to the cries of “Hosanna!” which means “Save us!” from Jerusalem’s crowds and the One who came to save all those who would call upon His name. “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Joel 2:32 / Romans 10:13)

#### II. Hypocrisy Denounced

With his authority in mind then, what should be the response of those who truly seek the Messiah? Well, obviously not the same as the Pharisees and scribes to whom Jesus spoke in Matthew 23:1f. Their lives were characterized by attitudes and behaviors that denied the authority of Jesus, ignored the deepest emphases of the Scriptures and oppressed the sincere response of those they had been called to lead into deepening relationship with God. Their lives were filled with spiritual pride and presumption that Christ strongly admonished his disciples not to emulate. Let us consider the ways in which their lack of humility was evident.

##### A. Religious Oppression

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, <sup>2</sup> “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, <sup>3</sup> so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do.

For they preach, but do not practice.<sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

Four things to consider here:

1) **Jesus is by no means commending the scribes and Pharisees** by his statement to the disciples, “do and observe whatever they tell you.” **He is merely suggesting** that to the extent their teaching is an accurate reflection of the Law of Moses, then **obey the WORD**. The law of Moses was, in essence, an exposition of the ten commandments which can be summarized in two essential ways. Love God and respect your fellow man. Thus, Jesus summarized the law with his statement, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart ... and love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” Matt 22:37-40

2) **The scribes and Pharisees, however, had so adulterated the law that the essence of the original was obscured.** William Barclay provides a helpful example and explanation in his commentary:

“... the great principles of the Law were broken up into thousands upon thousands of little rules and regulations. . . . for instance, the Law said that a man must not work on the Sabbath day, ... the scribes labored to define work: how [it must be laid out], how many paces a man might walk on the Sabbath, how heavy a burden he might carry, the things he might and might not do. By the time this scribal interpretation of the Law was finished, it took more than fifty volumes to hold the mass of regulations which resulted.” (from the intro to ch. 23, *Barclay's Daily Study Bible*)

3) **Jesus condemned the Pharisees for the burden of legalism they had established for all.** Contrary to the objective He declared in Matthew 11:28f, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The Pharisees sought self-aggrandizement and subjugation of their fellow Jews through the hypocritical portrayal of a false superiority and self-righteousness. Their bloated version of the law was a prop to perpetuate the rouse of their greater godliness. Sadly, the result was the establishment of an impossible standard which no man could meet.

Quoting Barclay again, “... their whole outlook on religion had one fundamental effect. It made [obedience to the law] an intolerable burden. **Here is the test of any ... religion. Does it make wings to lift a man up, or a dead-weight to drag him down? Does it make [for joy or depression]. Is a man helped by his religion or is he haunted by it? Does it carry him, or has he to carry it? Whenever religion becomes a depressing affair of burdens and prohibitions, it ceases to be true religion.** *Barclay's Daily Study Bible*

4) **Jesus warned his disciples that the Pharisees did not practice what they preached.** Their expositions of the law were so bloated with pietistic detail that even the Pharisees themselves, could not abide by all the rules nor did the majority of them even try. Barclay provides a summary of the Talmud's own description of seven degrees of Pharisee that are so ridiculous they are comical from our present-day perspective. (Summarize **very** briefly)

- a) The Shoulder Pharisee
- b) The Wait-a-Little Pharisee
- c) The Bruised & Bleeding Pharisee
- d) The Hunch-backed Pharisee
- e) The Ever-Reckoning Pharisee
- f) The Fearing Pharisee
- g) The God-fearing Pharisee

The reality was, however, that few if any of the Pharisees were seeking the ultimate objective of loving God truly from hearts of sincere devotion. Their lives were the epitome of hypocrisy – nothing more than a religious performance. This brings us to Jesus’ second indictment.

## B. Spiritual Pride

<sup>5</sup> They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes [on the corners of their garments] long ...

**They made phylacteries.** These were scrolls of paper or parchment, wherein were written four paragraphs of the law: God’s directives on the night of the Passover in Egypt (Exodus 13:2-16), the Hebrews’ creedal statement called *the Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) and the reiteration of commands to teach successive generations to love God and His law (Deuteronomy 11:13-21). These phylacteries were to be worn on their foreheads and left arms, according to the directive of God in [Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#),

<sup>4</sup> “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> **You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and ... between your eyes.** <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. **Deut 6:4-9**

The Pharisees made these phylacteries broad, that they might be thought more zealous for the law than others. **God also appointed the Jews to make fringes upon their garments in [Numbers 15:38](#), to remind them of their being a peculiar people:**

<sup>37</sup> The LORD said to Moses, <sup>38</sup> “Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner. <sup>39</sup> And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. <sup>40</sup> So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God. <sup>41</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the LORD your God.” **Numbers 15:37-41**

... but the Pharisees made these tassels longer than was common with the intent of suggesting their deeper piety. Matthew Henry stated accurately, **“Pride was the darling, reigning sin of the Pharisees, the sin that most easily beset them, and which our Lord Jesus [took] all occasions to speak against.”** *Matthew Henry Bible Commentary*

## C. Personal Presumption

<sup>6</sup> and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues  
<sup>7</sup> and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.

You may recall Jesus’ earlier admonition to the Pharisees in Luke 14:8f where Jesus specifically said, “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give *your* place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place.” He used this occasion in Luke’s recollection to state the same principle he states in our text today, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (vs.11) The Pharisees had obviously not learned from the previous reprimand for pride!

Here, Jesus goes on to reprimand their desire for title. The term “Rabbi” was not merely a cordial greeting to a colloquial teacher or even a title of respect for someone of slightly superior intellect and spiritual prowess. Osborne writes in the *Expositor’s Commentary*, **“The term indicated a revered teacher, and the whole village was expected to show deference to such an elevated personage, even greater respect than to their parents.”** The scribes and Pharisees were guilty of pride and wanted everyone to acknowledge how important they were. Osborne, *Expositor’s Commentary*

Some manuscripts even include the repetition of, **“Rabbi, Rabbi”** (רַבִּי רַבִּי), which may refer to a gradation of rabbinical hierarchy that was prevalent at the time. The most authoritative individuals were addressed as “rabban.” Those with substantial but less than superior clout were called “rabbi.” The least in the hierarchy were simply “rabh.” According to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Methodist commentator, Adam Clarke, **“The rabbins were looked up to as infallible oracles in religious matters, and usurped not only the place of the law, but of God himself.”**

Thus the desired designation that the Pharisees’ sought and Jesus denounced was that of one who considers himself superior in theological authority and spiritual significance than most common men.

#### D. Considerations

1. How often do we seek to bolster our sense of security or substantiate our spiritual status by acts of righteousness: church-attendance /giving/membership/spiritual disciplines/service?
2. Do we ever consider or cause others – particularly children or younger believers – to think that burdensome obedience is the measure of spiritual health? “... good because of *what* you do.”
3. Do we ever – like the Pharisees – fake spiritual fatigue or zeal for the purpose of affirmation?
4. What superficial spiritual evidences do we provide as signs of our Christian piety / sincerity?
5. Whose affirmation as spiritual authorities and examples do we seek and to what extent?

### III. Humility Demanded

Whatever props we provide ourselves or whatever achievements we’ve realized – spiritual or otherwise – Jesus makes clear that authority and affirmation and audience and expectation are not to be sought from fellow believers. They are ALL spiritual siblings and not subservient to any authority we may presume to possess.

#### A. Disciples and Brothers

<sup>8</sup> But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.

William Barclay, whose commentary I’ve already referenced was pastor of a single small church in Scotland before he became made professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University in 1964. During this [final decade of his life he published and] became known for his popular 17 vol. commentary series [on the New Testament entitled], *The Daily Study Bible*, which sold more than 1 million copies in the 20 years [following its publication].

Our *brother* Barclay said the following of himself: "I have a second-class mind. It is the simple truth that I never had an original idea in my life. . . . I don’t make the slightest claim to inspiration in preaching or writing." His self-assessment is astonishing considering that he was regarded as one of the foremost Christian authors, preachers, and teachers of his day. Yet it was typical of this unassuming man who is lovingly remembered for his ability to communicate the truth of the Gospel in terms that everyone could understand. His simple faith presented through [more than 50] books, [commentaries], radio and television broadcasts moved millions of people to open their hearts to God.” (Bio from CBD.com website)

## B. Stewards and Sons

<sup>9</sup> And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.

We are ALL children who have been claimed and called and equipped by the mercies of our Heavenly Father Who loved us before and in spite of any gifting, goodness, station or service. The reality of this mutual son-ship and the absence of any superior human authority does not suggest, however, that God has not called an equipped some to exercise authority over the body of Christ as overseers and stewards.

... egalitarianism frees his disciples to live in a community where humble reciprocal service rules (18:1-5; 20:25-28). Social ethnic, and gender differences are relativized in Jesus's family, which devalues status and prizes submission to his teachings. On balance with Jesus's teaching elsewhere (e.g., 10:1-4; 19:28; 23:34; 28:19), such egalitarianism is not inconsistent with the presence of specially gifted and commissioned leaders in the community (cf. Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17)

... Jesus did not find male apostolic leadership to be contrary to [the ideal of egalitarianism], and evidently neither did Paul (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6). But gifted individuals who exercise office in the church ... must do so with humble service as their ideal and with Jesus's family imagery as their model. Turner, *MATTHEW: Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 548.

## C. Students and Servants

Yet, we ALL are students of God's Spirit Who endows us with any and all knowledge we possess that we might ever seek a deepening knowledge of God's glory and employ such knowledge in the encouragement and edification of fellow believers. Jesus concluded his corrective to the Pharisees with these words, "Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant." (vs 10-11)

**Summary:** All these individual challenges to any spiritual presumption may be summarized in ..., "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (vs 12)

## D. Personal Confession

Each of us must consider these issues of presumption and be willing for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction concerning relationships – whether they be with fellow believers, children we are to nurture and/or spouses with whom we are to walk in faith – relationships where we often expect or even demand the authority of "master," "father," or "teacher."

- 1) Do you expect, perhaps even exploit, the authority as "master" in your home, your marriage, etc.?
- 2) Men, do you demand special privileges and treatment and take advantage of your identity as father, thereby forsaking the God-given responsibility and opportunity to love and serve with humility?
- 3) Do you – any of you – presume to be the "instructor" about matters of faith, life, relationship, trials, etc. where your perspective is truly not applicable and you'd be better off keeping your mouth shut and your knees bowed on behalf of those whose circumstances you truly can not offer godly or gracious counsel?

Should any of these questions sting and you think that I assume any undue authority in asking them, let me assure you that the admonitions of this text have landed especially heavy upon me in light of presumptions the Lord is bringing to light in my own life as of late. I cannot say that these revelations are comforting or easy as so much of my life and regrettably my identity has been wrongfully wrapped up in the notion that I am a "master" among my peers, a "father" to certain believers – several in my own home – and an "instructor" whose knowledge and expertise have earned me the right to be heard or even obeyed.

I'm reminded of several statements surrounding the achievement of my doctoral degree from Southern Seminary, now more than a decade ago. The following light-hearted but wise counsel was given by my mentors on the day of my commencement: "The achievement of a doctorate in any field only assures you of one thing – how little you know about the majority of disciplines that are more significant than the one in which you have invested your effort and intellect and life these many years."

My young son would say it more simply when he finally gained an awareness that his father held a doctoral degree. When asked on one occasion in kindergarten what *his* dad did, he said innocently but accurately, "My dad's a doctor ... but he can't do anything!"

Later, my children became fond of saying, "My dad's a doctor of God."

While I wish, in one sense, that were true, it is by God's grace that I am not. For, I have already taken the achievements and expertise and knowledge that God has graciously granted me over decades of study and made such a shameful monument to them and myself that there is little that truly separates me from the sinful, self-absorbed perspective of a Pharisee. I have so shockingly reckoned myself the master of my educational discipline which *is* music, though I might even dare to say *worship*, that I have succeeded more often than not in demonstrating that the true essence of worship, which is spiritual surrender and self-sacrifice, truly escapes me. Far more of what I do and how I lead and what I say and how I think are about me – my achievement, my affirmation, my perspective, my way – than they are about the Savior I say I esteem above all.

What a grievously idolatrous position to find myself in! I pray you would forgive these presumptions on my part as I am seeking, by God's grace, to forsake them altogether. I say with sincerity, that I am bewildered by the conclusion at which I have recently arrived; that being, so little of what I have aspired to, sought to achieve, even the majority of my discipline and study has little or no application in the context of our corporate worship. How is that, you may ask? Because the calling to live and serve among you is not and never will be about me – What I am able to achieve among you, what I deem best, what I hope to be commended, what I have experienced and seek to replicate, what I prefer, what I've been taught, not even what I want to teach you. What is absolutely necessary is to return to the reality that should have been primary from the beginning: "*Whatever* the Lord wants to accomplish through me for your good and His glory is best."

#### IV. Ultimate Exaltation

I can either respond to the realization of this self-absorbed perspective with bewilderment and resignation or with repentance and gratitude for God's patience with and purposes for me? Thankfully, there is a brother from whose similar experience I can learn. The Apostle Paul, provided a similar personal testimony of repentance to the believers in Philippi whom he challenged to abandon any attempts of substantiating their lives through works of the flesh. The Spirit of God wrote these encouraging words through him to them and to us for our *mutual* renewal.

<sup>3</sup> ... we are the [true] circumcision (that is, those who truly belong to God), who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— <sup>4</sup> though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, **in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ**, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—  
<sup>10</sup> **that I may know him and the power of his resurrection**, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.  
**Philippians 3:3-11**

What I need now as never before and I suspect many of you require as well is a renewed understanding that all the things we are prone to put our confidence in and seek affirmation from are rubbish. What we require – certainly the most fundamental things – are:

- A. Identity in Christ and Righteousness attributed to us by Christ**
- B. Grace from Christ that comes *through Faith* in His merits – not our own**
- C. Resurrection – that is true and eternal life – from Christ and the Glory that comes from being secure, accepted and alive forevermore in Him.**

May we with renewed humility “consider all things of this world only loss in the light God’s glory and love!”

## PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

### CLOSING SONG: *I Need Thee Every Hour*

I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord  
No tender voice, like Thine, can peace afford

**I need Thee, Oh I need Thee!  
Every hour I need Thee.  
O bless me now, my Savior,  
I come to Thee!**

I need Thee every hour in joy or pain  
Come quickly and abide or life is vain

I need Thee every hour, Most Holy One.  
O make me Thine indeed, Thou, blessed Son!

Annie Sherwood Hawks | Robert Lowry  
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