

Matthew 23:1-12 RSV

Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, ²“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; ³so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice. ⁴They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger. ⁵They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men. ⁸But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. ⁹And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. ¹⁰Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. ¹¹He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; ¹²whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

For Reflection and Prayer:

Was there a word, a phrase, image, or feeling that ‘shimmered’ as you listened? Allow it to land in your heart. Stay with it. Savor it.

Reflect on what you heard. What effect does it have on you? What meaning does it hold for you? What does the Holy Spirit seem to be conveying to you? Talk it over in your prayer. Perhaps you want to draw or color your prayer or journal the conversation.

As the time of prayer comes to a close, share some moments of quiet with Jesus, simply resting safely in his presence.

Matthew 23:1-12 The Message

Now Jesus turned to address his disciples, along with the crowd that had gathered with them. “The religion scholars and Pharisees are competent teachers in God’s Law. You won’t go wrong in following their teachings on Moses. But be careful about following them. They talk a good line, but they don’t live it. They don’t take it into their hearts and live it out in their behavior. It’s all spit-and-polish veneer.

4-7 “Instead of giving you God’s Law as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. They seem to take pleasure in watching you stagger under these loads, and wouldn’t think of lifting a finger to help. Their lives are perpetual fashion shows, embroidered prayer shawls one day and flowery prayers the next. They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, preening in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees, and getting called ‘Doctor’ and ‘Reverend.’

8-10 “Don’t let people do that to you, put you on a pedestal like that. You all have a single Teacher, and you are all classmates. Don’t set people up as experts over your life, letting them tell you what to do. Save that authority for God; let him tell you what to do. No one else should carry the title of ‘Father’; you have only one Father, and he’s in heaven. And don’t let people maneuver you into taking charge of them. There is only one Life-Leader for you and them—Christ.

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.