

Main Idea: In Matthew 23:8-12, Jesus turns religion upside down. The difference shows up in two attitudes, one that we reject and the other that we adopt.

- I. Jesus confronts *status-seeking* (8-10).
 - A. We don't seek authority over people (8).
 - 1. We have one Teacher.
 - 2. We are brothers.
 - B. We don't seek access to God through people (9).
 - 1. We have one Father.
 - 2. He is in heaven.
 - C. We don't seek acclaim from people (10).
 - 1. We have one Guide.
 - 2. He is the Christ.
- II. Jesus commends *servanthood* (11-12).
 - A. The servant is the greatest (11).
 - 1. That's true of Jesus.
 - 2. That's true in the church.
 - B. The humble will be exalted (12).

Take Inventory: How can I tell if I'm settling for mere religion?

- 1. Am I hung up on externals?
- 2. Am I experiencing joy in serving others?
- 3. Am I making Christ the center of my life?

Nepal trip report (part two)

It's amazing to ponder what happens every Lord's Day. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. God has made it possible for sinners like us to be forgiven and have a relationship with Him. And He not only gives us a relationship with Himself, but also a new life, a Christian life, in which we do things that used to be foreign to us.

Sometimes when a person receives Christ as Savior, non-Christians will say, “He got religion.” And we know what they mean. Praise God for these two realities. A new relationship. And a new, religious life (I use the term religion in the positive sense). The two go hand in hand. The first leads to the second.

But here's the question. Is it possible to have the second without the first, to be religious but not have the relationship? It's not only possible, but an ever present danger. And it's the very danger Jesus exposes in our current series, “*The Danger of Being Religious.*”

This morning we're returning to Matthew 23 in a series we began last week. Jesus is speaking, and He's delivering a sermon unlike any other He preached. In it the Master pronounces seven “woes” upon a group of people. Who received this pronouncement of a sevenfold woe from the Savior? Wicked people? Yes, they were indeed wicked, but not as we often define wickedness. Let's read what Jesus had to say, beginning with last week's text as well as today's.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 23:1-12

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at Matthew 23, see the messages preached at WBC in 1999.

Picture in your mind two people. We'll call them Bob and Bill. It's Sunday, and both Bob and Bill are in church. Bob has his Bible with him. So does Bill. Bob has some money in his pocket he's planning to give. So does Bill. Bob always gives at least ten percent of what he makes to the Lord's work. So does Bill.

Bob had his devotions before he came to church. So did Bill. Bob led his family in prayer before they ate breakfast earlier in the morning. So did Bill.

Bob sang the hymns earlier in the worship service, some of them from memory. So did Bill. Bob is taking notes of the pastor's sermon. So is Bill.

Bob is concerned about what's happening to the moral fabric of society. So is Bill. Bob wrote a letter to his senator to urge him to defend the rights of the unborn. So did Bill.

Bob served on the board of his church in the past. So did Bill. Bob helped deliver food baskets to needy families last year. So did Bill. Bob keeps his Bible on his desk at work. So does Bill. Bob knows a lot about the Bible. So does Bill. Bob calls himself a Christian. So does Bill.

Bob and Bill are very similar, aren't they? To the human eye, yes. But there's a fundamental, eternal difference between Bob and Bill. One knows *about* God. The other knows God. One possesses citizenship in heaven. The other, should he die today, would enter a place of torment called hell.

Which is which? I don't know. It's impossible to tell from external appearances. But I do know this. Jesus knows the difference between the Bobs and the Bills of this world.

In fact, it was to men who lived lives every bit as impressive as Bob's and Bill's, to the most religious people of His day, that Jesus spoke these stunning words, "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell (Matthew 23:33)?"

There's a difference between having religion and having Christ. We began to explore this reality last week in a six week series entitled, "*The Danger of Being Religious.*"

Jesus preached Matthew 23 during His final week, just a few days before the religious establishment carried out their wicked plot to kill Him. This message, undoubtedly, added fuel to the fire of their fury. But it was no mistake. Jesus came to earth for the purpose of dying, to provide a payment that sinners need, including religious sinners.

Actually, according to verse 1, Jesus preached this sermon to the crowds and to His disciples while in the temple in Jerusalem. But this message was clearly an indictment against the religious establishment in Israel. Seven times Jesus uttered the prophetic words of condemnation, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (13, 14?, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29).

Though I don't agree with his theology, Harry Emerson Fosdick put it well when he said, "Some people have just enough religion to make themselves miserable."

Last week we worked our way through verses 1-7 where Jesus exposed the danger and delusion of the Pharisees. We reminded ourselves that in first century Judaism, the Pharisees were the good guys. Their name indicates their approach to life. They were the Separated Ones. They were champions of morality and ethics, and devoted their lives to keeping a strict set of laws, some from God but most man-made, in their attempt to live a God-pleasing life.

The Pharisees were impressive. But Jesus wasn't impressed. Jesus told His listeners in verse 5 (NIV), "Everything they do is done for men to see." They turned the

Scriptures into a showpiece and clothing into a test of spirituality by “making their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long.”

Yet worse than what they *do* is what they *love*. In verses 6-7, Jesus says “they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues”, and “they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.’” In other words, Jesus says they love to use religion to feed their egos, to make much of the person who matters most to them. Not God, but themselves.

Would you say, in light of Jesus' words, that the Pharisees had a problem? Without a doubt. This is what makes Matthew 23 so relevant for us. Friends, most of us have been more influenced by the leaven of the Pharisees than we might think. When Phariseeism creeps into our thinking, we syphon grace right out of the gospel. Oh, we preach “salvation by grace” (after all, it's in our doctrinal statement), but in reality what we're clinging to is a works-approach to righteousness. Just like the Pharisees.

So how can I tell if I am a true Christian (that I have a genuine eternity-giving relationship with Jesus Christ) or if I'm merely religious (a Pharisee)? That's a vital question for all of us. In Matthew 23:8-12, the Lord explains that the difference shows up in two attitudes, one that we must reject and the other that we must adopt.

I. Jesus confronts status-seeking (8-10).

You'll notice a shift occurs in verse 8. To this point, Jesus has been talking *about* the religious leaders, and He'll return to that subject again in verse 13. But in verses 8-12, Jesus talks *to* someone. To whom? To those identified in verse 1, to His disciples, and to those in the crowd who are considering becoming His disciple.

Verse 8 begins, “But you.” The “you” is emphatic. *You* are not to be like the religious leaders I've just described. They think that status with God is something they merit, and that status with people is something they deserve. *But you* are not to be like them. There is no place for status-seeking the hearts of my followers.

To make the point Jesus uses three negative scenarios in verses 8-10. Since we're not to be concerned about status, there are three pursuits we are not to seek.

A. We don't seek authority over people (8). “But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.”² Notice that Jesus picks up the last characteristic of the Pharisees He just mentioned in verse 7. They loved “to have men call them 'Rabbi.’” But to His disciples Jesus said, “Not you.”

The title “Rabbi” was used of respected teachers. It meant “my teacher” or “my master” or more literally “great” or “my great one.” The verb is passive. “Don't let others call you 'Rabbi,’” is the idea. Don't seek it or desire it or promote it. Don't use a title that suggests that you are the great one, that you possess authority over people.

Why not? You'll notice the next word is “for.” It indicates a reason is about to follow. In fact, in each of the three scenarios, after telling us what we're not to do, Jesus explains *why*. He gives reasons.

Think about this, my friend. Biblical Christianity is *reasonable*. It's not just, “Do this because I say so.” That's the approach the Pharisees took as they “tied up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders” (4). But Jesus offers a reasonable explanation.

So why aren't we to use the title rabbi? For two reasons.

² NIV, “But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers.”

1. *We have one Teacher.* The NIV and the KJV both use the word “master,” but the Greek term is *didaskalos*, aptly translated “teacher” in the NASB and ESV. “For you have one teacher,” says Jesus.

The major emphasis in this verse, as well as in the two verses that follow, is on the word *one*. We have *one* Teacher (8). We have *one* Father (9). We have *one* Instructor (10). We have *one* who is our authority, *one* to whom we look for truth, for answers, and for guidance. And who is that?

It's Christ, and Christ alone. He is our Teacher. What then are we?

2. *We are brothers.* “You are all brothers,” says Jesus. The Greek word is *adelphoi*. The root word in *adelphoi* is *delphoo* or “womb.” Brothers are individuals who come from the same womb.

What makes us *brothers*? This does. Listen to Jesus' words in John 3:3, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” Peter stated in 1 Peter 1:23, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

Let that sink in. If you've been born again, and the person next to you has been born again, then guess what that makes you both? You are *brothers*. You've been birthed from the same womb and are now members of the same family.

Please realize that Christianity is a family affair. All who know Christ as Savior are brothers and sisters. We have one Father (9).

Not so with religion. In religion, getting to heaven depends on your personal merit, so there's competition and jockeying for position, recognition, and respect. There's a pecking order and ranking. Status is important.

Do we ever battle this mentality as Christ-followers? Oh yes. For starters, we may not seek the title “Rabbi,” but we have our own titles, like he's the “the Reverend Doctor So-and-So,” or he's “the Very Reverend Doctor So-and-So,” or, he's “the Most Reverend Bishop So-and-So.”

That's why I personally don't like the title “Reverend.” Though it's often used merely to communicate respect, the title often contributes to an unscriptural clergy-laity barrier that undermines the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. The truth is, we have one Teacher, one Great-One, and we who know Him are brothers.

And according to Jesus we are *all* brothers. Keep in mind this included Peter. There is no biblical support for giving Peter any papal authority over the church. There *is* authority in the church, but the authority is Jesus Himself and the Book His Spirit has given us.

There's a second pursuit we are not to seek. The first is authority over people.

B. We don't seek access to God through people (9). “And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.” In the first and the following third scenarios Jesus forbids us to “be called” something, using a passive verb. In the second scenario the verb is active. We are not to call someone else something.

What are we prohibited from calling another person? “Do not call anyone on earth 'father.’” Why not? Again, for two reasons.

1. *We have one Father.* Who is that? It's God. And where is God?
2. *He is in heaven.* He's in the place Jesus-followers are going when they leave this world.

“Father” is a wonderful title, and Jesus reserved this title for God alone. To whom did He teach us to pray? “Our *Father* in heaven (Matt 6:9).” In John 2:16 He referred to the temple as “my Father’s house.” The apostle John said that “our fellowship is with the Father (1 John 1:3).” Paul said that because we possess the Holy Spirit we may cry “Abba, Father.” Isaiah the prophet called on God with these words (64:8), “O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter.” (also 63:16)

Jesus told us not to call anyone on earth “father.” He’s not prohibiting a child from calling his dad “father.” His point is that we don’t seek access to God through people.

In the first century Judaism, tradition was big. What the “fathers” said held a lot of clout. In fact, oral tradition held just about as much weight as the Scriptures. To have access to God, you depended on what the “fathers” said.

To which Jesus said *no*. We don’t access to God through people. We don’t approach God through any human intermediary. We don’t need a “middle man.”

To put it plainly, we don’t even need a priest, for we already have one, Jesus the Christ. Hebrews 4:14-16 explains, “Since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence... (NIV).”

Abraham Lincoln once said, “My concern is not whether God is on our side; my great concern is to be on God’s side, for God is always right.”

An excellent point. But how do we get to be on God’s side? How can sinners like us approach a holy God? It’s not through our merit. It’s not through the merit of another human being. We need a priest who has access to heaven, and we have one.

G. Campbell Morgan, commenting on the statement “Call no man your father”, says: “This is our Lord’s forbidding of the recognition of any man’s power to impart by ceremony or in any other way, spiritual life to his fellow man... You shall never recognize any man who claims to be able, by sacramentarian grace or any other thing, to communicate life to your soul. The life of God in the soul of a man must come by the begetting of God.”³

To put it simply, we do not give the title “father” to any human being with the assumption that he can take us to God. We don’t need a man to take us into the presence of God, for we have the God-man Himself who provides us with full access to our Father in heaven.

There’s a third pursuit we are not to seek, according to Jesus.

C. We don’t seek acclaim from people (10). “Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.”⁴ The word translated “instructor” (NIV “teacher”) is an unusual word. It’s *kathegetes*, and this is the only place in the NT it appears. According to *Vines Dictionary*, the term denotes a master or teacher. It carries the idea of “to go before” or “guide”.

What does a guide do? Many years ago, our family visited the Ohio Caverns. Max, the owner of the caverns, was our *guide*. We followed him down the steps into the underground tunnel. We went wherever he told us to go. If we had a question about a

³ G. Campbell Morgan, p. 274.

⁴ The NIV says, “Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ.”

stalagmite formation, we asked Max. As our guide, Max was in front of us, showing us the way to go, and telling us what we needed to know.

Now back to Jesus' words. We are not to be called "Guide" or "Instructor". We're not to seek the reputation as being the Answer Man. Why not? For two reasons.

1. *We have one Guide.* "You have *one* Instructor," Jesus said. Who is it?

2. *He is the Christ.* This is foundational to Christianity. We have *one* person to whom we look for answers. He not only gives answers, but He *is* the answer. He not only speaks truth, but He *is* the truth. He not only guides us along the way, but He *is* the way.

Having said that, now a word of caution. Some use Jesus' words here to foster the notion, "I don't need the church, and I don't need anyone to teach me. Jesus is my Teacher." The problem is, the Teacher Himself says we need other teachers. He actually gave "pastor-teachers" (small "t") to His church (see Ephesians 4:11).

Yes, we need teachers. We need teachers who understand that the task of the gifted teacher isn't to invent truth, for he's not the "answer man." His task is merely to explain and exhort concerning what *The* Teacher has said.

This is why we're committed to expository preaching at WBC. Our preachers/teachers don't come up with a message and then go looking for biblical support. Our task is to proclaim this Book, line by line, word by word, doctrine by doctrine, and call for allegiance to the One who gave it.

So what's the difference between being a Christian and merely being religious? According to Jesus, it shows up first of all in our attitude towards *status*. No one is *the* teacher, or *the* father, or *the* guide. Those positions are already filled. We are all sinners, and if we're in the family of God, we've all entered the same way, through repentance and faith in Christ, and we are now brothers.

Friends, if we buy into the notion that it's up to us to reach God, as mere religion does, then status will be a big deal to us. Why? Because when we compare people with people, then some appear further along than others in their quest to reach God. Some know more. Some have cleaned up their act more.

And if we're further along than others, then we falsely begin to think we have earned the right to some respect and recognition. And we may even believe that we deserve to be called Rabbi, father, and teacher. And we'll even convince ourselves that we're not being proud or self-seeking, for after all, somebody should be in those positions. It might as well be someone as spiritual as *me*.

Jesus says *no*. Jesus confronts status-seeking. A true follower of Jesus isn't a status-seeker. That's what the merely religious do. Why would we seek status? We've already received the greatest position possible. God has adopted us into His family and says we are His children. Not by our merit, but on the basis of His grace.

II. Jesus commends servanthood (11-12).

In verses 8-10, Jesus confronts what we're *not* to seek. Then in verses 11-12 He challenges us with the alternative. Status-seeking is out. Servanthood is in.

Listen to Jesus in verses 11-12, "The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Religion, with its status-seeking, is the product of man. What Jesus says here goes against the grain of the natural man. Christianity is *counter-cultural*. Society will not

buy into what Jesus is teaching. It's radical. But go a step further. The *religious* won't accept this either. Thus, Jesus makes two shocking announcements in verses 11-12.

A. The servant is the greatest (11). “The greatest among you shall be your servant.” The greatest are not those with titles, or church attendance pins, or Bible knowledge certificates. The heroes in the kingdom of God are *servants*. Not people with clout in the world, not even the charter members, but *servants*.

“The greatest among you will be your servant,” says Jesus. And of course, what Jesus commends is what Jesus Himself modeled.

1. *That was true of Jesus.* Let me ask you a question. Is there any greater person than Jesus? No, there isn't. He is the very Son of God, the One who created the universe. All things were made through Him, says John 1:3. “There is but one Lord, Jesus Christ,” says 1 Corinthians 8:6, “through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” Colossians 1:16 says, “All things were created through him and for him.”

This is what makes the incarnation so breathtaking. The Son of God left the splendor of heaven, took on flesh, and become a lowly servant. “The Son of Man did not come to be served,” says Jesus in Matthew 20:28, “**but to serve**, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus came to serve, to give, and what He gave was costly. He gave His life as a ransom payment. Friends, our hero, our Savior, became our servant! And if that's true of Him, then it follows that it should be true of us.

2. *That's true in the church.* One day Jesus overheard His followers arguing with each other. Mark records the event in Mark 9:33-35 (NIV), “They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and **the servant of all.**’”

This will revolutionize any church, including ours, when we consistently live out Jesus' words. True greatness is found, not in throwing our weight, not in seeking our own agendas, but in serving others.

And notice the little word “your” in verse 11. In the Greek text it's plural. It's not just that Jesus is calling us to serve a few people now and then (particularly those we like). Rather, He says that the greatest is the person who is *your* servant (plural), the one who is willing to serve any and all who need such service in the family of God.

Again, this is counter-intuitive in a self-serving world. Jesus calls to be servants, not status seekers. To a religious person, the church exists *for me*. If I don't like the church, I leave. If I don't feel like participating, I don't. But according to Jesus, I exist *for others*. And that's why I must make church a priority in my life, because the church, which is God's household, is where I find the people Jesus says I am to serve.

Allow me to ask a pointed question. Is that true of you? Are you committed to assuming the role of a servant in the church in which the Master has placed you? Are you looking for ways to serve the people in your forever family?

Of course, this question just exposes our root problem. We are sinners, and by definition sinners left to themselves think only of themselves. Sinners need a Savior. And this is why Jesus came. He died for sinners. He paid the penalty for our sins, and He provides power to break the self-focused tendencies of our sins. When we depend on

Him, we serve others. And when we serve others, we're giving clear evidence that we do not have mere religion. We have Christ.

Friends, a church full of servants is a beautiful thing to behold. When a congregation of Jesus-followers die to themselves day after day, and serve each other out of love for Christ in practical, tangible ways, it sends a loud and clear message to an onlooking world. It says that Jesus Christ can do what mere religion cannot do. Religion can make people look different on the outside, but Christ transforms people on the inside so that it shows up on the outside.

This brings us to Jesus' second shocking announcement.

B. The humble will be exalted (12). Jesus' words are stunning, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." According to Jesus, there are only two options. The first? You can exalt yourself in the eyes of man, and be humbled by God. The second? You can humble yourself before God and man, and be exalted by God. Let's ponder these options carefully.

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled. Not, *might* be, but *will* be. Who will do the humbling? Jesus Himself will. When? When they stand before Him. Jesus, who later said He possesses all authority in heaven and on earth, will take those who have received the applause of men for their accomplishments in this lifetime and *humble* them.

Conversely, *whoever humbles himself will be exalted.* This too is Jesus' work. At judgment day, Jesus will exalt those who have humbled themselves in this lifetime. To become a Jesus-follower, you must humble yourself, admit your sin, and put your total trust in Him. Then to live as a Jesus-follower, you must do the same. You must take steps to kill your pride, by His gracious help, and cultivate humility moment by moment.

When trials come, when difficult people make life hard for us, the merely religious person says, "What are you doing God? I deserve better than this." But the person who has a genuine relationship with Jesus, humbles himself, and says, "*Help me be like You, dear Savior. You're in control of my life. I trust You.*" This is the constant prayer of the person who humbles himself, and who will one day be exalted.

Religion. Or relationship.

Several years ago, I read the following account by pastor and author Kent Hughes. "I once received a colored brochure which featured eight separate pictures of an 'evangelist' designed to show what a versatile man of God he was. It included pictures of him praying by a waterfall, praying with his hands on a pile of letters, holding a baby (he liked children), shaking the hand of a poor man (he knew poor people). But what really got my attention was the offer of a specially blessed handkerchief which had been dipped in the Jordan River and which, if prayerfully applied, would bring healing. The cost was \$15.00!"⁵

I don't know about you, but Matthew 23 puts fear in my bones. When I think that Jesus condemned the most religious people of His day, it hits me. Most of us are a lot more like the Pharisees than we'd care to admit. I wonder, have we settled for religion and missed the real thing? How can we tell?

Take Inventory: How can I tell if I'm settling for mere religion?

In light of Jesus' words to us this morning, three questions are in order.

⁵R. Kent Hughes, *Mark (Vol. 2)*, p. 126.

1. *Am I hung up on externals?* Like titles and religious protocol and man-made distinctions. The focus of religion is on externals, but if you are a true Christian, what matters most to you will be the *unseen*, pleasing the One we do not see.

Last week when flying back into New York from Doha, the flight attendant told me to open the window shade. I thought about it and said, "But the sun is blinding my eyes." It was true. We were banking south heading into JFK which meant the early morning sun would hit me right in the face.

She responding to my my objection by saying, "Open the window shade."

So I asked her why? She said, "Because this is what we do when we fly. We open the window shades when we land."

I said, "I know this. I have flown many times. I'm asking why."

She said, "Because it is regulation."

I said, "I know it is regulation. I am just asking why we need to put the shade up because if I do, the sun will be blinding to my eyes."

She said, "I don't know why. Just open the window shade."

That, my friend, is how religion works. In religion it's do something just because. There actually may be a good and even loving reason behind the required activity, but mere religion does not know that reason, nor care. Just do it.

I sat there wondering if there was a good reason behind the regulation, which my flight attendant did not know. Perhaps it's so everyone can enjoy the view of the landing, and not just the person in the window seat. Or perhaps it's so authorities can look inside the plane in case there's foul play, as in the case of a highjacking.

Later I asked google and found this answer. "Flight attendants ask passengers to open window shades during takeoff and landing to assess exterior hazards. This helps them see outside better and make informed evacuation decisions in case of an emergency."

There it is. There is a good reason behind the regulation. If I don't know the reason behind a regulation, it's easy to become bitter and complain. But when I see there's actually a *relationship* behind the regulation, that this action is for the good of real people, then I do the deed with appreciation rather than complaining.

Back to the question. Am I hung up on externals, like titles, and status symbols, and regulations? If I am, that could be indicative of a fundamental problem. I've lost sight of the importance of relationship, starting with God certainly, but also with others.

My friend, do you have a true, joyful relationship with your Creator? Do you know His Son personally? Or are you settling for mere religion?

2. *Am I experiencing joy in serving others?* An evidence of a true relationship with Christ is a desire to be like Him, to serve others as He did. Do you feel that desire in your heart, and are you cooperating with His Spirit and putting it to action? It brings me great joy as a pastor to see this happening in this church in so many ways, to see you serving one another by preparing and teaching lessons from God's Word, by visiting and caring for the needs of the infirmed, by providing biblical counsel to those struggling, by loving babies in the nursery, and on and on. When Christ is in your life, you find joy in serving others.

3. *Am I making Christ the center of my life?* Brothers and sisters, we have one Master and One Teacher. Does Jesus occupy the central place in your heart and life? Are you finding joy day by day in living for Him? A merely religious person may tack

Christ onto an already crowded life, but a person who truly knows Jesus, who has been saved by Jesus, will not settle for this, for that person knows that One who gave His life for us is worthy of our all.

Closing Song: #385 “*Near the Cross*” (all four verses)

Testimony of salvation: Ed Ruggles

Closing charge: Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Community Group Discussion:

1. What is religion? Did you grow up in what you would consider to be a religious home? Is religion a good thing? When is it not?
2. In our current series, “*The Danger of Being Religious*,” we’re pondering Jesus’ words concerning some of the most religious people in His day. In Matthew 23, the Lord confronts “the scribes and Pharisees”. Use your study Bibles and smart phones to research these two groups in Judaism. How were they similar? How were they distinct? What was their reputation?
3. Take time to read again Jesus’ words in Matthew 23:1-12, and then have someone walk through the main points of the sermon outline. What stood out most to you from this message? What questions did it produce? What insights do we gain into Jesus from this passage?
4. What does Jesus say about using titles in verses 8-10, and why does He say this? Are titles ever appropriate, and if so, when? When are they inappropriate?
5. What are the evidences of true greatness, according to Jesus in verses 11-12? In practical terms, what does it mean for a person to “humble himself”?
6. In future weeks, Jesus will have much more to say to us about the Pharisees. As we finish today, discuss this question. Can a Pharisee change, and if so, how? Think of a biblical example, and if possible, a personal example.

Further reflections on regulations versus relationship:

As we were driving by the river on our trip to Dhankuta we saw a crowd having a funeral service for a man who died. Later we asked someone about this. This person told me that the water is so pure they can drink it right out of the river. I said what about the burial? He said, “Oh, they burn the ashes on the shore. It’s okay to drink the river water.” But, I thought, does this not end up in the water too?

In America we have many regulations. I am sure there is one that says you cannot bury someone next to a river. We have regulations regarding burial vaults etc. I am thankful that someone thought enough of our community life to create regulations. They are for our Good. if a person says, if I do not understand the purpose of a regulation, I have a right to complain about it. That is not the sign of maturity, but of immaturity. It is a sign of pride to think that if I don’t understand something, I have the right to complain and even disobey.

This is true in the church as well. If I don’t understand something, I have a right to complain about it, to have a bad attitude about it. this is not so, says a mature person. I know there’s a loving and good reason for regulations I may not understand. Because life is not about me, but about all of us together.