

Matthew 22-01-16a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 16th day of January 2022.

We're in Matthew chapter 23. Jesus is speaking to the crowds about the scribes and Pharisees, the religious leadership of the day, the religious practice of the day, and what their relationship to these individuals should be. Like the letters to Timothy and Titus that were written by Paul, we can learn a lot, not only about how leadership should behave and those who either are called or call themselves to positions of influence in the midst of believers should be thought of, should think themselves should behave, and how those who are in their vicinity should respond.

So this is very pertinent and helpful information, especially in the modern day where we have people who are now called influencers all over the internet, social media. So we're going to find Jesus has some of the most pertinent teaching one could imagine, whether you watch Christian television, whether you listen to blogs or read the stream of consciousness that people post in various places, read Christian books, or just attend Bible class at GTBC, all of us find wonderful direct personal application in what Jesus says in this portion of Matthew's gospel. So I look forward to this portion with great enthusiasm.

Let's ask God's blessing on it as nourishment for our souls, and we'll begin. Father, we are so grateful for the Lord Jesus Christ and the new life that He has made possible for us that we have entered into that is sustained by the power of Your Spirit and the truth of Your Word, Your promises, the meaning and purpose that You have invested in our lives when left to ourselves. We had no purpose.

There was no real meaning. We are incapable of delivering ourselves from sin or of obtaining righteousness by any efforts of our own, but through Your grace, You have given us life. You have removed our sins.

You have enabled us and empowered us to lay hold of righteousness, to walk in love, to speak the truth in love, and to learn and grow thereby. We pray that as we look at this portion of Your Word, Your Holy Spirit will truly minister it to each of our hearts so that we are transformed and our renewed and we more closely reflect the Lord Jesus Christ as we represent Him on this earth. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's read our passage. You will remember the first part because we have seen it several times now with the imposition of religious hypocrisy in this second day ahead of Jesus' arrest and trial and crucifixion.

This is what He chooses to talk about. He does not give the Sermon on the Mount on this day. He does not still storms or perform great healing miracles on this day.

This is vital information. It's some of the last teaching that He is going to present. It is therefore understandably critically important.

Let's take a look at it. Matthew 23. Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples saying, The scribes and the Pharisees have sat down in Moses' seat.

We've seen this. This is not the seat of judgment in the gate. This is the seat where the law is delivered.

The law is read. So what did Moses do? Moses brought the Word of God down from the mountain. Moses wrote down the law and communicated it to Israel.

That was his primary function. You remember after his father-in-law Jethro gives him some wise counsel, he's not really even involved in adjudication. Moses doesn't adjudicate.

Moses communicates. It is the elders who will take the law and interpret it, much as we have the body of law that is made by Congress and then it is interpreted by the courts, or at least in theory that's how it's supposed to work. So when they sit down in Moses' seat, this is the seat of communication, specifically reading the law of Moses.

That's what Moses' seat is for. It's not a judgment seat. It's a communication seat.

So the scribes and Pharisees have sat down and taken on that role. That's why you don't have the Sadducees or the Essenes or the Zealots or any of the other major political or parties mentioned here, because uniquely the scribes and the Pharisees claim to be, purport to be, function as experts in the law. This is what the law says.

Therefore, verse three, whatever they tell you, and you can scratch out to observe if you've got a new King James, that's been added later. Whatever they tell you, that observe and do. Observe what they tell you and make it happen.

When they're communicating the law of Moses, listen to that law, observe it, and do it. I personally like this because we always think about the triangle of perception for Christians where we observe, then we interpret, then we apply. This is observe and apply.

Whatever they say, observe and do. He's leaving out their interpretation of the law. Observe the law, do the law.

Don't listen to their intermediate step of interpretation because he's going to go on to describe that. Do not do according to their works for they say and they do not. What happens between the reading and the saying and the observing and the doing? Where are they going wrong? If they're reading and saying the law, but they are not doing it, what step has gotten broken? Interpretation.

Interpretation is so important to understand the meaning and the pertinence. One of the major principles of interpretation is balance. We don't go too far in one direction or too far in another direction.

God's truth is not given in extremes. This is why Paul will say in one of his letters, let your moderation be known unto all. Be moderate.

We don't spend all day, every day in prayer, but we pray frequently. We don't spend all day, every day reflecting and meditating on the word of God, but we do it frequently. We don't spend all of our time in the world with our job, with our social life, with our entertainment.

We find moderation. Let your moderation be known to all. Do not be carried away to an extreme.

You can see this in the exhortation to not be drunk with wine because that's excess. That's extreme. Be filled with the spirit.

So they say and do not do. Something has broken in the middle step of interpretation. Verse four, they bind heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on men's shoulders.

They themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. Very fascinating. They bind sticks together into a bundle and make it a burden.

Normally, we can pick up a stick here or a stick there. Those of us that gather kindling understand this principle, but instead of taking a measured amount of God's word, Moses' deliverance of the truth of God's law, they bind it together. They make it such a big bundle and they lay it on men's shoulders so that they're barely able to carry it.

So they've taken it and tied it together and made a burden out of it that is hard to bear, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. The word move here is the word from which we get kinetic, kinetic energy. But in Greek, it means to to impel a thing, to stir is a good translation.

And with one finger, they will not impart any motion to the burden. They won't lift a finger to help move it. Now, think about these sticks that make up this bundle.

Where do the sticks come from? This is them sitting in Moses' seat, reading the law. Jesus says, listen to what they say, but don't bind it into a giant bundle and make it too hard to bear. This is where we get the concept of line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.

If sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, then sufficient unto the day is the truth that we apply the portion that is useful and meaningful today. We don't have to understand an entire book. We don't have to invoke the entire angelic conflict, all of the realms of

dispensationalism or covenantalism or an entire epistle.

Today, maybe out of the long book of 1 Corinthians, all I need is chapter 13. Maybe all I need is chapter one or chapter two. I take the stick that I need, that I can carry in my hand and use to steady myself as I walk.

I take a single stick, home in on one or two essential truths. Sometimes if you want to ski, you want two poles. I've tried skiing with one pole or no pole when I would drop them or have some other issue.

My brief and spectacular agony of defeat skiing career. But there are times when it's good to have two sticks, one for each side, two crutches, a walker that's got three or four points of support. But it has to be something we can lift, something that we can move with, something we can travel with.

We don't bind everything together into such a load that it's too hard to bear. I take personal application from this. And I think others can as well, whether you are a teacher, whether you're a parent, whether you are seeking to speak the truth to someone in love, to present a few sticks.

A Bible class such as this, that is too full of information, that tries to cover too much ground in too short a time, becomes a burden that's hard to bear. I, of course, have never done this, but I have heard that it can happen. When we're talking to someone and we get excited about our faith and we think they might be interested, as my dad used to say, we can make the situation like trying to get them to drink from a fire hose.

This is a really cogent, pungent observation by the Lord Jesus. Bad leadership, bad communication overloads the hearer and makes it too much to bear. A few simple truths, not only for the communicator to present and for the hearers to hear, but for us, as we look into the treasury of God's word in our souls, we don't have to understand everything.

We don't have to parse everything. Give us today our daily bread. I don't need to buy groceries for the next six months.

I don't need to bring them all into my storehouse. I just need the bread that fuels me and energizes me today. A few sticks, properly applied, have leverage.

A great bundle of sticks just becomes a heavy load. So it's a wonderful truth. These bad leaders, poor communicators, tie too much stuff into a bundle and lay it on people, and then they don't even use a finger to help move it.

Notice these sticks need to move. It's on people's shoulders because they need to walk, and these sticks are supposed to be something useful, something helpful, something needful. But if you put too much in the package and then you don't give any guidance,

any proper interpretation, any encouragement to cultivate the power of the Holy Spirit to implement these, it's bad.

It's bad leadership. You shouldn't be sitting in that seat if all you do is make heavy burdens, and you make the word of God burdensome instead of exciting. You make it a load to carry instead of power in the soul to bear our own burdens and bear one another's burdens.

The word shouldn't be the burden. It should be the power to help carry burdens. And they've done just the opposite.

This coming section in the chapter is going to be a presentation of opposites, what should be and what is. What is but shouldn't be. So, we'll not move them with one of their fingers.

And for the people in Israel's day and even on down into the modern Jewish practice in synagogues and so on, and even in churches, many times when a large scroll was unrolled, the passage was selected, they would use their finger to hold a wooden reading stick. They didn't want to touch the manuscript itself. The scroll is too holy to be touched.

Those who copied it would generally have a cloth under their hand. And the only thing that would touch the page was the end of the pen and the ink. And anytime the name of God was written, the tetragrammaton, they would cover it so that dust would not stick to the ink and so on.

There was great mechanical respect for the scroll. So, when they would unroll these scrolls to read them, rather than touch them, they would use their finger to hold, you could think of the handle of a wooden spoon. If you held the wooden spoon the wrong way around, this is your placekeeper, so that as you look up at your audience and look down, you can keep your place.

So, people would see the scribes reading the scrolls of the law, and they would see their finger moving across. And you get the idea that they're willing to use their fingers to tie the cords around these heavy bundles. To tie, you have to use your fingers.

If you've ever had a broken hand or a cast or wearing thick gloves, you can't even tie your shoe. They're tying great bundles together with their fingers, but they won't give any encouragement, any power, and they themselves won't even move a stick. And there's a twofold picture here.

One is the reading of the law using the finger. It's all about reading it, but providing no encouragement as to how to perform it. And the how has always been the grace of God.

In our day, it is the spirit of God. But the spirit of God has always been available to those

who are seeking. He isn't given in ubiquitous form until the Lord Jesus is glorified and you have a body that is not defined by the nation of Israel, but by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit creating the body. That's why John says the Holy Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified. When Jesus is glorified and goes to the right hand of the Father, his body on earth is defined by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Israel was defined by physical genealogy, physical descent. That defined Israel. We are defined by spiritual descent, spiritual birth, spiritual heritage.

And therefore those who are born of the spirit have to live by the spirit, walk in the spirit, be guided by the spirit, be filled with the spirit. But we sometimes mistake and I think I've even been guilty of suggesting that there was a very narrow and scarce ministry of the Holy Spirit in the age of Israel on the basis of the John passage. And I've come to understand in more recent years that the Holy Spirit has always been available to those who were asking and seeking and knocking.

But it was on an individual basis by request. If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, Jesus says, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? And that was in the Old Testament day that he's talking. It was the Old Testament day that it was true.

So if you're going to sit in Moses seat and deliver the word of God, how is any amount of weight moved? How are those sticks of truth employed? What makes them move? How can they be an asset and an enablement for moving rather than a burden that crushes people and makes it impossible to move? How does that happen? It is the Holy Spirit. We've been over this many times. They will not move them with one of their fingers.

What do they do? Verse five, all their works they do to be seen by men. This introduces a theme that is going to be followed for the next few verses. They do their works to be seen by men.

And it's easy to blow right by this and get into their bad practices. But this statement is key. How many times has Jesus said, what you do, do in secret.

Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Your father who sees in secret will reward you openly. You don't have to pray in public.

When you pray, go someplace very private because you're praying to your father. You're not praying to people. That principle over and over again.

All their works they do to be seen by men. And this is the question we have to ask ourselves. Is my spirituality, my interest in the Word of God, in the exercise of my

Christian identity, my Christian faith, to what extent am I motivated by the knowledge that people are watching me? This is my personal problem with the notions of modeling Christian behavior and mentoring because it goes easily into direct violation of this principle.

We do not and should not do what we do to be seen by people. Even when we think that their seeing is going to be a benefit. I am sure that the scribes and Pharisees justified much of their behavior by the notion that they were setting a good example.

Let me be obvious and let me be bold in revealing how righteous I am because this will help other people be righteous. They weren't all just mustache twisting dishonest John. They fooled themselves as well as attempting to fool others.

Of course, when you're fooling yourself and fooling others, everybody else figures it out before the perpetrator. But they do their works to be seen by men and this gets at the very heart of our mission to love God and love one another. If we love God, we do what we do in His name and for His sake because we love Him and we want to please Him.

We want to serve Him. We want to reflect His love and His truth and His glory in this age. We want the light to shine to reflect off of us so that others will see that light and be drawn to God through Christ.

So our service should first of all be motivated by what will God think? Is this something that will please Him? How can I please Him? Given my options at this moment, what would be the thing that would please Him most? It's usually the path of self-sacrifice. It is usually the path of putting ourselves out in the interest of something outside ourselves larger than ourselves. And it is outward looking.

How can I look out for the interests of others, not just my own interests? There is an outflow. Our faith is toward God. Our love is toward God.

Our love is toward our neighbor. Our love is toward our fellow believers and by extension beyond them to the world at large. And there is a movement.

This movement of the sticks goes outward. This attitude, doing what you do to be seen by men, is seeking praise from men. I want the flow to be toward me instead of from me.

And there was an expectation that because I am so holy, God is sort of obligated to bless me. So the thinking here that Jesus describes is inherently subjective. I have my eyes on people, not because I am looking to see what their interests are and how I might be positioned by God and equipped by God, gifted by God, provided for by God, to help meet those needs.

I want my need for approval, my need for a feeling of security, my need for approbation to be met by these people. So I do what I do because I am expecting an inflow of

appreciation. I am expecting an inflow of respect or admiration or some other elevation that is going to come by seeking to impress people.

I am doing it for what I will get out of it. Even in my religious practice as these men, I am doing it for what I will get out of it. This is how they could twist the law into keeping all of their money instead of providing for their parents.

Well, I am going to interpret this in a way that I get the most out of it instead of what would my parents get if I support them as the law of Moses demands and so on. So this is key. All their works they do to be seen by men.

The problem is motivation. So now back to my first question, how did they go wrong sitting in Moses seat and communicating the truth of God's word, which is something we also should do in love with and for each other, with and for our children, with our family members, with our friends, to anyone who asked us a reason for hope. So if the second stage has gone wrong, interpretation has gone wrong, my question is how did it go wrong? Did they read the wrong hermeneutics book? Did they adopt the wrong principles of interpretation? How did the understanding go wrong so that the application is so far off the mark? Well, Jesus tells us right here, if your motivation in going to the word of God is to figure out how to get from God and get from people, your interpretation cannot be valid because you are starting from a faulty premise.

The word of God is a way for me to get ahead. This will make me successful. This will make me happy.

This will help me to prosper. And you can see how this has worked itself out in the prosperity gospel, in the speak it and it will come to pass, the word of knowledge, name it and claim it. All of these, when you analyze them, are to benefit self.

I don't have something I want, this is a way to get it. Where genuine Christian practice, genuine Christian faith, hope and love is always outward looking. What can I do to be a blessing? What can I do to reflect the grace of God that flowed toward me? How can I reflect that grace and that love toward others? Benefit flowing outward, not looking for benefit to flow inward as my primary motivation.

Obviously, we are thankful that God will bless us when we are faithful and obedient, and we avoid judgment, we avoid discipline, we avoid chastisement, and that's a good thing. But our fundamental primary motivation is love for God and love for our neighbor. And that motivation comes from faith in God's word.

Faith is the means, hope is the motivation. When we see that God's word guides us into understanding what God expects, what is in fact beneficial to others, we expect that God will bless those efforts, that God will implement his power in and through us to accomplish his will. And because we love him, we think that's great.

We do not do what we do to be seen by men. Fundamental problem, that's why they make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. It's just so fascinating to listen to Jesus speak, because every word is so rich with content and with fullness.

Phylacteries is just a genius way to express what he's just been talking about. A phylactery was a capsule in which was rolled up a tiny scrap of parchment that had the Shema and a few other verses written on it. So here you have the word that you are sitting in Moses seat to proclaim.

And what do you do? You put it inside a container where it can't be seen or read, and you strap it to your head and you strap it to your hand. And instead of making the content of that word known and meaningful and available, using your finger to move those sticks toward people who can use them for benefit, you tie the word of God to your head and to your hand in a useless way, a useless way. The original command we've seen it before in scripture was metaphorical.

Bind the word of God as frontlets between your eyes, meaning we talked about augmented reality and how you have an overlay of reality that gives you these digital avatars and icons and advertisements. And it's kind of like a clear television screen. You can see reality through, but the television screen is matching things to your reality.

The original idea of that is having the word of God as frontlets before our eyes so that everything we look at is identified and assigned a priority. And we are guided into the right way because we always have the principles, the truths of God's word before us. And it tags, it identifies, it guides, it leads, it prioritizes for us reality.

Have it as frontlets between your eyes, not put it inside a leather capsule and strap it to your head where you can't see it. And all anybody else sees is you got something strapped to your head. So they made the phylacteries broad.

They wanted you to know from all the way at the other end of the street, I'm a religious person. You can see my phylactery half a mile away. And the thing is so big in my hand, I can barely use that hand.

Some of these guys, even that they were technically, even according to their tradition, only supposed to wear these when they went to do the Shema and to pray a couple of times a day. They were supposed to strap these on and have them on as a sign to God that they remembered his instructions. And as they came before God with these phylacteries, it was, Lord, I understand your metaphor, and this is my symbolic recognition of the importance of your word.

I have bound it to my head. It's like wearing a cross on a necklace that you are—but it was supposed to be during prayer and supposed to reflect it to God. What they were

doing instead is making it big and wearing it all day long.

Some of these guys even slept in them. It's like some cults have magic underwear they wear all the time. They would never even take them off when they slept because that's how holy I am.

And I hope my wife will tell the coffee clutch that, you know, old Bill, he even sleeps in his phylacteries. That's how holy he is. So doing to be seen by men, not to be seen by God.

They enlarge the borders of their garments. And you remember that on the borders and on the corners were these tassels tied with a blue cord. And so they would make these gigantic tassels on this outermost garment.

It's a square thing. And by wrapping it the way they did, two of the corners would hang down in front of your shoulders. So these great garganzzo tassels with blue cord, they would make them huge like, you know, curtain pull tassels so that they could be seen from a distance.

So you've got this stuff strapped to your head and your hand. You've got these big giant tassels and great wide borders. You know, the border of the garment was what the woman with the issue of blood touched when she approached Jesus.

If I but touch the hem of his garment, this was this exact same border. You think about the difference between the outflow of grace and love and healing that came from not seeing the border, but touching the border, touching the truth that it represented, touching the truth that was wearing it, healed that woman without a word. These people, these scribes and Pharisees, these hypocrites talk and talk and talk.

They symbolize and symbolize and symbolize all with the hopes of being seen by men and being glorified by men. It's an inflow. You get the idea that if this woman with the issue of blood had touched their wide borders and their tassels and their phylacteries, it would have sucked the remaining life out of her instead of the grace and love of God flowing outward.

This is the point Jesus is making when he speaks to his disciples and he speaks to the crowds and he says, just because someone is associated with the truth doesn't make what they are doing right. Listen to the truth. Don't follow the wrong interpretation and application that those communicators may be foisting on the unsuspecting public.

So this informs us to whom should we listen when there is communication of the word of God? What are the biblical guidelines for those who communicate? If there's a lack of application in a man's own household, then he shouldn't be serving as an elder in the church. If there is a lack of love in his personal relations, whether it's his marriage or his kids or his workplace, if he's a noted angry man, if he's a noted activist in secular things,

then that's a clue. You can still listen anytime someone is communicating the word of truth, but hop off the train before it gets to interpretation and application.

This is Jesus' exhortation. Well, much to think about there. Let's pause here and take our break.

We're going to enjoy some fellowship and special music. When we return, we are going to see what we should and should not call and be called. As much labeling and intersecting and identifying as is going on in our world today, this is a wonderful section full of fruitful application for us, and we'll see it when we come back.