

Title: THE TEMPTATIONS OF MOSES' SEAT, MATTHEW 23:1-12
(Chatham, NJ; 10/30/11, AM) [Pc – Exegesis]

Theme: The Pharisees faced temptations that are common to all of us and that can be neutralized by humility.

Purpose: To explain the temptations and the role of humility in countering each.

Introduction:

1. The Pharisees and Scribes played a role in passing on the Laws and teachings of Moses; they sat “in Moses seat.”
2. They fell prey to certain temptations; they epitomized things common to all of us.
3. Let’s examine them lest we succumb to them.
4. Let’s also look at it through the lens of humility (see verse 12).

I. Preaching without Practicing (1-3)

A. Moses’ seat

1. Inheritors and trustees of the Mosaic Law and its interpretation.
2. In Romans 2:17-24 Paul takes the Jews to task for preaching without practicing.
3. Although this discrepancy is common to all of us, they seemed unable or unwilling to admit their shortcomings.

B. A common discrepancy

1. In the Wise and Foolish Builders Jesus addressed those who heard the word but failed to heed it.
2. To put the commands into practice is the essence of true discipleship; anyone can talk a good game. Actions speak louder than words. (Jets’ coach vs. Chargers’ coach)
3. The Pharisees had even gone a step beyond this; they told everyone else what they should do and still didn’t live up to the commands.
4. This step made their lack of obedience less tolerable than the person who listened but didn’t obey.
5. They knew, even insisted upon the truth, but refused to burden themselves with obedience.

C. Pride closes our eyes to our failures

1. They could not see the gap between what they said and what they did.
2. It was too shameful to admit.
3. They preferred to keep up appearances.
4. Humility has no problem admitting failure; in fact humility prepares the way for a solution to the disobedience.
5. “He who humbles himself will be exalted.”
6. Humility breeds honesty with yourself.

II. Tie Heavy Burdens, but Won’t Lift Them (4) (close to the first problem)

- The Pharisees took the Laws and made them burdensome, for example, the Sabbath was so regulated that even today observant Jews must be super-fastidious about what they can and can’t do (turn on lights, light the stove, etc.).
- I heard a radio program about one company that produces unleavened bread, and they go to extreme lengths to insure there is no leavening.
- Galatians 6:1-5 provides us a good interpretation of what Jesus wants.

A. Restore but watch yourself (1)

1. Restoring someone to spiritual health demands spiritual maturity, not merely knowing right and wrong.
2. "Watch yourself;" it demands humility to recognize one's weaknesses.
3. Only someone humble enough to realize he is a sinner can do this effectively: with gentleness and understanding.

B. Bear the burdens of others (2-3)

1. This is the antithesis of the Pharisees who tied burdens and refused to lift them.
2. Verse three assumes that the problem with not bearing the burdens of others is that the person thinks he is above doing such things.
3. Bearing the burdens of others fulfills the Law of Christ, but it should not lead to perpetual dependency.
4. Psychologists call this enabling, and the next point addresses it.

C. Bear own load

1. This may seem contradictory.
2. But it provides a hedge against those who might think that they can be utterly dependent on other people.
3. This kind of thinking keeps people perpetually in need of others' help.
4. Christianity will not tolerate those who use others to do things that they should do for themselves any more than it will tolerate those who don't look to carry the burdens of others.
5. People who demand that you pay their college tuition and demand that you give them a job do not understand their responsibility before Almighty God.

III. For All to See (5)

A. Parading righteousness

1. Deut. 11:18 taken literally
2. Distinctive clothing: phylacteries and fringes
3. Places of honor and distinction: at feasts and in the synagogue
4. Greetings and titles: rabbi
5. A temptation for the disciples who often sought honor and prestige (20:20-28).

B. Jesus warned about this, Matthew 6:1-18

1. Keep your left hand in the dark about what your right does. (It isn't our job to know what other people do with their money.)
2. Prayer is done behind closed doors. (Between you and God alone: you can't make a false impression on Him)
3. Fasting is not for public consumption.
4. In each case God provides the appropriate reward, not the reward we get from public approval.
5. Righteousness is a quiet characteristic; it does not need trumpets and fanfare.

Conclusion:

1. Verses 8-12 provide the better way.
2. Not rabbi, father, nor instructor: provides for equality and service.
3. Epitomized by the statement, "The greatest among you shall be your servant."
4. Humility before God brings exaltation.
5. Seek his approval and all these things will fall in place properly.