

not a fan.

COMPLETELY.
COMMITTED.
FOLLOWER.

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Matthew 23.1-7 & 23-28
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Prepared by Dr. James Wilson
jim@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x112

I. Connecting With One Another

What are some of the "household rules" you grew up with? Have you ever had to deal with rules and regulations that seemed to make no sense to you? What was that like?

II. Introduction to this Series and Study

We are in week four of our Lenten series entitled *Not a Fan: Becoming Completely Committed Followers of Jesus* (learn more at gspc.org/not-a-fan). While being a fan can be fun and entertaining it is not the same as being fully involved in the endeavor fans like to watch and cheer for. As we have been pointing out, Jesus never calls us to be his fans, cheering from the sidelines, tuning in when "there's nothing better on," or getting involved when it's convenient. What we see in the gospel accounts is Jesus calling us to be *followers*.

This week, in Matthew 23, Jesus turns to the religious leaders who have been questioning him (perhaps in order to assess whether he is worthy of their fandom) and sternly takes them to task. These men insist that people play by their rules. The problem is that fans are content to merely obey the rules. Committed followers realize that it's what's inside a person that counts.

III. Study the Text

- a. Begin by getting a sense of the context by reading Matthew 22.15-16, 23-24, and 34-35. What are these influential religious leaders trying to do? How do they view Jesus?
- b. Now read Matthew 23.1-7. Jesus turns to the crowds of people gathered with his disciples in the Temple grounds (a common place for Rabbis to speak in public). He begins by citing that the Pharisees and teachers of the law "sit in Moses' seat." These religious leaders saw themselves as being part of a long line of successors to Moses who were to carry out a role of teaching the Law and the Traditions of the Elders. What do you think about Jesus' directive: "you must obey them and do what they tell you?" What does Jesus warn them not to do?
- c. Look at verses 4 through 7. What four specific behaviors does Jesus cite? How would you summarize these characteristics. How would you describe the priorities of these men?
- d. Can you think of examples of people today who are more concerned about their outward appearance than their inner person? More concerned with receiving recognition than caring about or serving others?
- e. A series of "Woes" or stern warnings of judgment, are recorded in verses 13 through 28. Let's look at verses 23-24 first. Jesus addresses the Pharisees (a group with a strong nationalistic sense that sought to compel people to obey the Law of Moses and a plethora of rules so that Israel would earn God's favor and send the Messiah to deliver them from Roman rule) and teachers of the Law as "hypocrites". Define "hypocrite". What charge or judgment does Jesus make in these verses? Are there ways people today might do the same thing - focus on particular religious "rules" or practices but fail to practice the more important things of the

heart like justice, mercy, and faithfulness? Can a meaningful relationship be built on rules alone?

(By the way, the word "hypocrite" originally meant play-actors but by this time the term was also used pejoratively for two-faced people, whose behavior either differed from their belief or varied when they were with different people. Six times Matthew 23 the Pharisees are called hypocrites. Jesus indicates that while they act the part of the godly person, their own hearts are far from him.)

By the way, do you often picture Jesus being so harsh? Does this stern tone surprise you? Does it alarm you?

- f. What is Jesus' judgment against these "hypocrites" found in verses 25-26? How does external appearance differ from the internal reality? Do you agree that Jesus is adamant that, to borrow the Ben and Jerry's ice cream advertising slogan, "It's what's inside that counts?"
- g. The judgment in verses 27 and 28 is scathing. How would you summarize it?
- h. This week a young person asked, "How can I become a fully committed follower of Jesus?" My first thought was to be confident that Jesus is worthy of such commitment. Then I thought of Ephesians 1.13-14. What do these verses suggest about how one moves from the external to the internal? What (or Who) does God give to those who trust in Jesus?
- i. Look at John 16.1-15. What does the Holy Spirit do in a person? How does the Spirit enable you to be a fully committed follower?
- j. Look at Galatians 5.16-26. How else does the Spirit work in you? In what kind of transformation does the Spirit seek to bring about? (I believe this is what Jesus sought for the Pharisees and Teachers to experience and that is why he addressed them so strongly.)
- k. Finally, look at Ephesians 5.17-18. How can you continue to live as a fully committed follower of Jesus (and not just a fan), how can you continue to develop Christ-like character, and how can you be continually guided as you follow Jesus?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Take some time to reflect on any ways you are relying on the external things - following the rules, following your family's religious practices and traditions - rather than experiencing the presence of Jesus within you. Can you see yourself turning from these things and seeking to really know Jesus in a vital personal and deep way?
- b. Being a fully committed follower requires a dependence upon the presence, power, and fullness of the Holy Spirit. Are you willing to pray for that fullness? Will you allow God's Spirit into every part of your life - your relationships, your work, your thoughts, your decisions, your use of time and money, and where you need to be made more like the character of Jesus?.

V. Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Praise God for the gift of life, the gift of creation, the gift of Jesus, the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- b. Exercise "spiritual breathing" by **exhaling** things like failures, sins, disappointments, discouragement, and others, then **inhaling** by asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Allow God's Spirit to enter those places needing a healing, forgiving, guiding, empowering touch.
- c. Pray for Good Shepherd as we continue in a time of discernment regarding denominational affiliation. Ask that we be clearly and definitively guided by the Holy Spirit.