

A Different Kingdom

Warnings and Woes Matthew 23

“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” Matthew 23:12

1. Read Matthew 23. What is Jesus’ evaluation of the teachers of the law and Pharisees? (verses 3b–7; 16a)
2. What characterizes the people of the kingdom of heaven? (verses 11–12; see also Matthew 5:3–10; 6:1–6)
3. The Pharisees and teachers of the law cling not just to Old Testament law but also to an extensive oral tradition that heaps do’s and don’ts on top of the original law. What does Jesus say is the effect of adding all these extra rules? (verse 4)
4. In contrast to the heavy burden of the law, what does Jesus offer? (Matthew 11:28–30)
5. Rather than welcoming the kingdom of heaven, how have the teachers of the law and Pharisees responded to it and to Jesus? (verse 13; Matthew 12:9–14, 22–24; 21:14–16)
6. Jesus over and over condemns the teachers and Pharisees as hypocrites. What is at the root of their hypocrisy? (15:8–9) Can you identify areas of hypocrisy in your own life?
7. How are the Pharisees completely off target in their teaching about oaths? (verses 16–22) How does Jesus’ teaching cut through such legalistic hair-splitting? (Matthew 5:33–37)

8. What “important matters of the law” have the teachers of the law and Pharisees neglected? (verse 23b; Micah 6:6–8)

9. How do the teachers of the law and Pharisees believe they are better than their forefathers? (verse 30)

10. Despite what the teachers and Pharisees may think about themselves, Jesus warns them that their generation will bear the guilt for “all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth....” (verse 35). Why will this guilt fall on them? (verses 31–36; 27:20–26)

11. What essential truths do these “blind” religious leaders fail to see and teach? (Psalm 4 and Psalm 51:15–17)

12. What are some ways you catch yourself thinking like a Pharisee, forgetting that the basis for life in the kingdom of heaven is grace?

13. What image of gentle protection does Jesus use in verse 37? To whom does Jesus compare himself in using this image? (Ruth 2:12; Psalm 91:1, 4)