

## SUBDAY SCHOOL NOTES 7 March 2021: How Rude! (Matthew 23)

We are surprised to hear people thinking that Jesus could be rude because we know that he did not sin and that being rude is sinful.

However the Pharisees and the other religious leaders were constantly acting rudely towards Jesus. They interrupted his teaching; they didn't give him any peace; they told people that he was the 'son of the devil' and that they should not listen to him. The people had listened to the teachers of the law for so long they just couldn't even imagine that their leaders might be wrong. Therefore some people began to think that Jesus must be in the wrong.

Jesus knew what the Pharisees were doing and thinking. There came a time when Jesus knew that he had to fight their evil publicly so the crowd wouldn't miss out on God's message of love. And when he spoke he used very fierce and colourful language so the people would get the message.

But he started by reminding people that when the Pharisees spoke words from the Scriptures they were speaking God's words – and God's laws were right and important. So people must do what the Pharisees *said*, but they mustn't do what they *do*!

Then Jesus explained:

1. The lawmakers were not good at doing - just at telling! They gave the people lots of rules to follow and they made a big show of keeping these rules themselves. They pretended to be holy, putting extra-long fringes on their prayer shawls and wearing extra-large phylacteries (boxes they strapped to their heads to remind them of God's law). They loved to be regarded as holy and important. But they were not really God's people.
2. In fact, Jesus said, "they lock people out of heaven" (v 13) instead of helping them to get to know God so they could go to heaven.
3. Jesus also calls them "blind guides" and "blind fools" (v16, 17) because they were too blind to understand that God's promises were coming true.
4. They were very fussy about detail. For instance they made a big show of 'tithing' – of giving a tenth of everything to God. So they carefully counted out their herbs, but they continually broke laws about serving God and caring for God's people. Jesus exaggerated to shock people into hearing this: "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (v24).
5. He also said that they were like 'white-washed graves' – all clean on the outside, but full of rotten bones inside (v27)
6. He called them 'snakes and vipers' (v 33) because they poisoned people against God.

And of course he told a story (Luke 18:9-14)

Two men went up to pray.

One was a Pharisee and he organised to stand in a place where everyone could see him and prayed in a big loud voice: "Thank you that I am not like other sinful people." And then instead of admitting that he still sinned at times, he told God about all the good things he was doing. He wasn't really talking to God. He was letting the other people around know how superior he was. His prayer was just a show. And God knew that!

The other man who went to pray was a tax-collector. He probably wasn't very honest and probably over-charged people. No-one liked him. He found a dark corner to pray in and whispered a prayer, asking God to forgive him. God saw that this was a real prayer.

As a result God forgave the tax-collector but didn't even connect with the Pharisee.

No-one should be dishonest about themselves and God. (That would be like saying "Sorry for stealing the last cookie, Mom" when your hand is in the cookie jar! You don't feel sorry at all! It is just something you say.) God sees into our minds and hearts so we need to be honest with him. We can tell him what we feel – he won't be shocked. He loves us enough to forgive us and to help us to live in his ways. But he cannot stand hypocrites! So be honest with him.

**Prayer:** Thank you God that you know us better than we know ourselves. On the one hand that is scary news, but on the other hand it means you can help us in our worst moments. Help us not to live a lie, not to say one thing but do something else. Thank you that you are wonderful enough to take any comments we make to you without getting angry. Help us from this moment on to be honest through and through so your love can shine through us.

### **Readings**

Monday: Matthew 23: 5-8

Tuesday: Matthew 23:13, 23-24

Wednesday: Matthew 23: 25-26, 27-28,

Thursday: Luke 18: 9-14

Friday: 1 John 1:5-10