



THE BOOK OF

# MATTHEW

DAILY READINGS

MAY 16 – 20

## Day 1 – As I Say, Not as I Do

### Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

#### Scripture Reading – Matthew 23:1-12

The 1991 Genesis song *Jesus He Knows Me* was about the hypocrisy of TV evangelists, who seemed to preach the importance of following God and obeying him. At the same time, they were continually mired in scandal after scandal, whether sexual, financial or both. The song contains the lines “God will take good care of you/Just do as I say, don’t do as I do,” which was very true of those TV evangelists – and true of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. They teach one thing, and it is a good thing; Jesus doesn’t knock what they are saying because it is found in God’s word – but their lives do not match up with the good words coming from their mouths. They are seeking people’s approval; they are *trying* to be noticed through bigger phylacteries (small boxes with words of Scripture in them) and longer tassels on their robes (see Numbers 15:37-41).

Leaders don’t always live what they preach. Like anyone else, they can make mistakes, get it wrong, and succumb to various character weaknesses and flaws. And just like anyone, they can be known by the fruit seen in their lives. We need to critically evaluate what they say and cast an attentive eye over the way they live their lives. That is where their character is revealed and where we can see whether they are developing into truly Christlike servant leaders, motivated by Jesus’ call to serve others, not by a desire to look good to others.

#### Questions to Consider

What does it mean to be humble and a servant? How are we letting others have a say in how we are doing this?

#### Prayer

Lord God, teach me humility. Show me how to serve others humbly and lovingly for their sake and the sake of your kingdom. May others come first in all that I do. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

## Day 2 – Blind Spot

### Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

#### Scripture Reading – Matthew 23:13-22

Wouldn't it be great if there was a sequel to this episode? Wouldn't it be quite amazing if Matthew had included a follow-up here? If one or two, or even several of the Pharisees had come up to Jesus after his admonition and said, "You're right, we've got it wrong, we've been blind, and we've missed the point. Thanks for showing us. What can we do to fix our mistakes and not let this happen again?" What Jesus is saying here is pretty harsh and uncompromising but vitally important – especially for the Pharisees and teachers of the law – even though they don't realise it.

We all have a blind spot or two, of varying sizes, in different areas of our lives, where our blindness, brokenness or weakness stops us from accurately seeing ourselves and those around us. We rely on those around us to pull us up and speak to us about our flaws and failings, which Jesus is doing here. His words were harsh, but they weren't just for show. As pointed as his words were, he was trying to get the Pharisees to see what they couldn't, to acknowledge their failings, and change. He genuinely wanted them – and wants us – to get his point, to be open to critique, and more than this, open to change, open to being changed and transformed by the power of God.

#### Questions to Consider

What is your blind spot(s)? How are you showing you are open to others pointing out your weaknesses and failings? What do you do when they do?

#### Prayer

Heavenly Father, help me be open to your penetrating word and the words of those you have placed around me, those who can see what I cannot and, like you, love me enough to tell me. Amen.

### Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

## Day 3 – Woe is Me

### Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

#### Scripture Reading – Matthew 23:23-26

The woes are more difficult if they're directed at you. To be faced with such a litany of calamity and destruction – and to take it (and the speaker's authority) seriously – would be rather depressing and cause much alarm, if not deep self-examination. Much better if the woes are directed at someone else, that way, you don't have to take too much notice; we might be tempted to do this with the woes in this passage. But it is precisely what we should not do. As much as it might be fun to revel in the discomfort of the Pharisees and smirk at the insults Jesus hurled at them, we need to ask ourselves, "Could he be talking to us?" Is it possible that some of the accusations Jesus levels at the Pharisees might also apply to us? Could he be in the best position to point out our blind spots?

Because Jesus only rails at the bad guys, doesn't he? Not at us, his loyal disciples? But actually, maybe he does. Maybe he is. Maybe he has a warning for us. Perhaps there's something he can see that needs addressing, that needs acting upon. As his followers, we should be open to his direction and prompting, but also his correction. We all need people around us to show us when we stumble, when we miss God at work, and when our dysfunction overwhelms and limits the impact of the coming kingdom. Jesus himself, who loves us beyond imagining, is the primary person to do so.

#### Questions to Consider

When did Jesus last correct you over something? How did he get your attention?

#### Prayer

Gracious God, I need your correction. Show me when I have stumbled and gone astray, and give me the courage to accept your admonition to return to your path. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

## Day 4 – The Last in Line of Those Not Listened To

### Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

#### Scripture Reading – Matthew 23:27-37

“Don’t shoot the messenger” is a saying the Israelites certainly wouldn’t have understood. When the message is bad, the messenger is blamed. Blaming the messenger seems to be the pattern of human behaviour and experience. It is undoubtedly how the Israelites dealt with the long line of prophets God sent to them. Ridicule, imprisonment and death were the usual results for these prophets. Their call for repentance and for the people to renounce their idols and sins often went unheeded, and they suffered for being God’s messengers. Their voices went unheard, and the people remained unrepentant.

And, of course, Jesus himself is soon to be the latest in this long line of dead messengers of God. Verses 30-32 show Jesus predicting his death, showing exactly where his bodily commitment to his people will ultimately lead him. The Pharisees play it safe, pronouncing from on high the moral and ethical standards required of the people (to varied effect) while completely failing to live up to the words they shower on others, showing their words cannot transform their own lives. Jesus comes humbly and gently, teaching, healing, inviting, and loving. His words and actions create a whirlwind, a firestorm, stirring up trouble yet leaving a swathe of transformed lives in their wake. Jesus didn’t look or sound as people expected God’s messenger to, yet he was so much more than a messenger.

#### Questions to Consider

What voices around you have you been ignoring that perhaps you need to listen to? Why? How can you do this?

#### Prayer

Almighty God, open my eyes and ears to the messengers you send and the words they share. Open my heart to your word and the things you would have me do for you and others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

## Day 5 – The Love of God for Us

### Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

#### Scripture Reading – Matthew 23:37-38

At the end of this long section of woes, warnings and admonishments, Jesus presents us with what has become a well-known image of the love of God. It's one of the times when the Bible refers to a maternal image of God: the mother hen protecting her chicks, covering them with her wings to shelter them and keep them safe. Although these verses do not use the word 'wept' as John 11:35 does, I can imagine Jesus surveying the city and mourning over Jerusalem's waywardness with tears in his eyes. As he cries out in anguish, he declares aloud the love God longs to lavish on his people, if only they would leave their selfish, rebellious ways and turn back to him.

But we can't just grasp hold of this motherly image of love and protection and forget the dire warnings preceding it; they go together. The hen protecting her chicks is a beautiful illustration of the love God dearly wants to lavish on us, the closeness he longs for us to experience. The prophetic warnings and woes beforehand shed light on why this is not happening, that the fault lies with us and our rebellion and sin, our desire to go our own way and do our own thing. God has sent so many prophets and messengers to his people, only for them to be harassed, stoned and killed. This is a pattern soon to be continued with his son. But God still waits, calling to us to come back to the safety of his wings, to the closeness of our relationship with him.

#### Questions to Consider

What does the image of the mother hen and her chicks make you think of? What is God saying to you at the moment?

#### Prayer

Loving Father, when you call, whether in love or reprimand, may I hear, listen and respond. May I remember that you call me to you for the sake of others who are not yet part of your kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

## Saturday/Sunday Notes

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