

Sunday, October 30–November 5 (A) – Matthew 23:1-12

The Challenge of Discipleship: *Humility*

Focus Question: *Who in your life models humility?*

word of life

“The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.” Matthew 23: 11-12 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 23:1-12

To understand Matthew 23:1-12, skim through the previous chapter. Matthew 22 is filled with descriptions of religious leaders interrogating Jesus, attempting to entrap him. Finally, Jesus turns to the crowds and his disciples, delivering his own evaluation. It is not favorable. He condemns the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy. They do not practice as they teach.

Jesus urges the crowd to learn from the *teachings* rather than the *actions* of the scribes and Pharisees. It seems these teachers have correct information, but have not applied the teachings to their own lives. They are hypocrites. In chapter 23, Jesus gives many examples to support his claim.

1. *What does it mean to be a hypocrite?*
2. *How could the scribes and Pharisees have gone so far astray?*

Then, Jesus turns things upside down by proclaiming, “The greatest among you will be your servant” (Matthew 23:11). How can this be? What does Jesus mean by this reversal? Why would someone *great* choose to become a servant? Jesus adds, “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12).

These might be idle words if they were not backed by Jesus’ own actions. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus practices what he teaches. He becomes a servant to all and sacrifices his life. In the process, Jesus is denied, betrayed and humiliated. It is a humbling journey to the cross. Jesus’ life and sacrificial death becomes a model for his own disciples. He does not just speak about becoming a servant; he becomes that very servant.

3. *How did Jesus model a life of humility?*

His life and death stand in sharp contrast to the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. His life of humble service condemns those whose lives do not reflect what their lips profess.

4. *What can be learned from Jesus’ warning about the scribes and Pharisees?*
5. *What does Jesus mean to “become a servant”?*

After the condemnation, Jesus laments over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39). There is no joy in scolding or condemning. To some, his tears might come as a surprise. Yet consider a parent’s profound grief and sorrow when his or her child chooses a path of destruction. Jesus desires to gather and protect his beloved like a hen gathers her brood. The depth of Jesus’ love is revealed. It is a love far beyond those who choose to follow him.

6. *What feelings are stirred in you as you hear of Jesus’ lament?*

word *among us*

A pastor from the United States was visiting several black churches in South Africa. During the visit, a respected elder in a nearby village died. The pastor wanted to attend and pay respects, so the host changed the planned itinerary in order to attend the funeral.

On the day of the funeral, the host seemed in no hurry to arrive at the funeral on time. In fact, the visiting pastor and host arrived about an hour after the funeral had begun. The pastor's embarrassment worsened as the pastor was slowly escorted down to the front pew to sit with the other pastors. Not only that, the guest pastor was the only white person in the church. Surely, this conspicuous guest had become a disruptive and negative distraction.

When the funeral was over, the guest pastor was invited to lead the funeral procession out of the church to the grave. Rain was pouring down, yet hundreds went to the graveside service. Afterwards, most people lingered to greet the widow.

Finally, the guest pastor had a chance to meet the grieving widow, fervently apologizing for being so late and for being a distraction. The widow interrupted the pastor's apology, "No, do not say anything more. Do not apologize. It was our sincere honor to have someone from the United States come to this funeral. My husband would have been so honored. You have taken your time to be here."

Ultimately, it wasn't about the pastor. It wasn't about being late or on time. It wasn't about rain or sun. It was about a widow who extended humble hospitality to a stranger. Ultimately, it was about brothers and sisters in Christ who shared a moment of grief; but more than that, they shared the glorious promises of the resurrected Christ.

1. *How did the guest pastor miss the point?*
2. *What might this pastor learn from the widow?*

Take a moment to reflect on humble people who you have met in your life. Write down their names as you ponder what they have taught you.

3. *Describe what it is like to be with a humble person.*
4. *What can you learn from a humble person?*
5. *How is humility a challenge for today's disciple?*
6. *What have you learned when you have served others?*
7. *What is the main message from Matthew 23:1-12?*

Prayer

Gracious God, fill our hearts with humility. Amen

Dig Deeper

Matthew 5:1-12



Daily Discipleship

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last word

This week, be intentional about being the last to be served and the last in every line. Pray for those in front of you.