

The Gospel of Matthew

Session 20: Let's Get Real

NEXT WEEK: Matthew 23 (be especially mindful of Matt 24:37-39); Deut 25:5-10, 13:9-10, 14:4, 14:12, Ex 32:1-2, 32:7-8, Matt 21:13, 23:28 CCC: NONE

Review: Jesus explains to His disciples how to achieve greatness in His kingdom “Whoever wants to be great must be a servant and must bear fruit.” this book concludes with a scathing judgment on the Scribes and Pharisees

NOTES AND QUOTE

1. Jesus teaches on number of different stories (not unusual for a rabbi in 1st century)
2. Jewish leadership wants Jesus dead and will try to *trick* Him by asking questions about paying taxes to Caesar (Pharisees were in opposition to Rome); Roman roads lined with people crucified for revolting against the Roman taxes
3. Jesus deflects their questions (traps) by asking a question; Main point of question was to give to Caesar what is his (Caesar's image is on the coin) and give to God what belongs to God (God's image and likeness are impressed upon us – we *belong* to God)
4. The reason the Jews must pay taxes is because they did not give to God what belongs to God; Israel broke the covenant with God and were to pay a high price (Lev 26:18) – *I will smite your sevenfold...I will break the pride of your power... make your heavens like iron... your earth like brass... your strength shall be spent in vain for your land shall not yield it's increase the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit... I will bring more plagues upon you seven fold...I will release wild beast among you...rob you of your children and destroy your cattle...I will walk contrary to you...I will bring a sword upon you...I will deliver you to the hand of your enemy*
5. Flavius Josephus¹ (a military leader and trained historian) makes deal with Romans to record revolt against Rome in 69 AD...he described famine, plagues, and slavery; this is the *evil generation* Jesus referred to and describes how far Israel had strayed from God's will and His covenant
6. Question from Sadducees: Man marries, dies and no children – widow marries his brother; that brother dies and marries another brother – still no children, etc.; Answer: *marriage ends with death and in heaven we are brother and sisters but know was a special relationship on either; marriage is about raising children and helping spouse become a saint*
7. Question: What is the greatest commandment? Answer: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind* (Deut 6) and love your neighbor as yourself (Lev 19:18); pattern of Jesus responses: relationship with God is related your relationship with others
8. Seven Woes: Beatitudes were blessings for doing right; the seven woes were *covenant judgment*
9. Seat of Moses indicates authority of leaders; Jewish leaders speaking with authority but not living what they preach² (How they dressed to show how special they were – Phylacteries³)
10. Call no man *Father* ⁴(Matthew 23:9)

¹**Flavius Josephus** (37 AD) - descended through his father from the priestly order of the Jehoiarib, which was the first of the 24 orders of priests in the Temple in Jerusalem; raised in Jerusalem and educated alongside his brother. 37 AD **Josephus** is certainly among the most enigmatic personages in the history of the Jewish people. **He wrote** "The Jewish War," **he wrote** a history of the Jewish people, and **he** was commander of the Galilean forces of the army that opposed Rome for two years. Flavius **Josephus**, original name Joseph Ben Matthias, (born ad 37/38, Jerusalem—died AD 100, Rome), Jewish priest, scholar, and historian who wrote valuable works on the Jewish revolt of 66–70 and on earlier Jewish history. The extant manuscripts of the book Antiquities of the Jews, written by the first-century Jewish historian Flavius **Josephus** around 93–94 AD, contain two references to **Jesus** of Nazareth and one reference to John the Baptist.
²Phylacteries - a small leather box containing Hebrew texts on vellum, worn by Jewish men at Morning Prayer as a reminder to keep the law.

³**Hebrews** 10:11 (NASB) Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;

Twenty-four Courses of Priests in Temple

¹ Chronicles 28:11-13, 19 (NASB) Then David gave to his son Solomon the plan of the porch of the temple, its buildings,

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its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms and the room for the mercy seat; and the plan of all that he had in mind, for the courts of the house of the LORD, and for all the surrounding rooms, for the storehouses of the house of God and for the storehouses of the dedicated also for the divisions of the priests and the Levites and for all the work of the service of the house of the LORD and for all the utensils of service in the house of the LORD; things; "All this," said David, "the LORD made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern."

Before the Temple was built, David received instructions from the Holy Spirit and showed Solomon how to divide the priests and the Levites and how they were to serve. In the Temple, there were several classes of Levites:

Priests ([1 Chronicles 24:1-19](#)) Priests' Assistants ([1 Chronicles 23:4,28](#)) Singers ([1 Chronicles 25:7-31](#))

Musicians ([1 Chronicles 23:5](#)) Gatekeepers ([1 Chronicles 26:1-19](#)) Keepers of the Treasure ([1 Chronicles 26:20-28](#))

In addition, there were also officers and judges ([1 Chronicles 26:29-32](#)) that assigned outside responsibilities.

The priests and the Levites were divided into 24 courses within their assigned class. The length of each course was 7 days ([1 Chronicles 9:25](#)). The week of service began and ended on the Sabbath ([2 Chronicles 23:8](#)). In addition, all the priests served for 3 extra weeks during the year ([Deuteronomy 16:16](#)). Each course of priests and Levites came on duty for a week, from one Sabbath to another. It should be made clear that not every priest and Levite in a course served every day. The service was subdivided among the various families which constituted a course. The number of families in a course varied. The singers had only one family in each course ([1 Chronicles 25:7-31](#)) whereas the other classes had up to 9 families in a course. The Jewish calendar has only 51 weeks in a year. Each of the 24 courses therefore served twice a year, plus 3 weeks they all served, for a total of 5 weeks during the year. Every 2 or 3 years, there is a leap year which adds a leap month. It was not certain how the priests served these extra days.

The Number of Priests and Levites

1 Chronicles 23:2-6 (NASB) And he gathered together all the leaders of Israel with the priests and the Levites. The Levites were numbered from thirty years old and upward, and their number by census of men was 38,000. Of these, 24,000 were to oversee the work of the house of the LORD; and 6,000 were officers and judges, and 4,000 were gatekeepers, and 4,000 were praising the LORD with the instruments which David made for giving praise. David divided them into divisions according to the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. There were a great number of priests and Levites in the Temple at all times. According to 1 Chronicles 23:4-5, there were 24,000 priests and priests' assistants, 4,000 gatekeepers and 4,000 musicians. They were divided into 24 courses according to their assignment. When a course was on duty, all its members were bound to appear in the Temple. Therefore there were more than 1,300 Levites in the Temple at any given time, although not all of them were serving on the same day. Based on this large population, David enlarged the number of vessels and furniture to be used in the Temple. For example, he designed not 1 lamp stand, but 10, as well as 10 tables of showbread and 10 lavers. He also designed vessels that were unique to this Temple. He made special "carts" which transported the lavers from place to place within the Temple. The "brazen sea," a large reservoir of water resting on twelve oxen, was one of the wonders of the ancient world. This water was used by the priests to purify themselves before attending to their sacred duties.

The Duties of the Priests

Before the break of the day, the priests on duty were ready and they assembled to cast lots to decide the assignment of the various daily tasks. It started with filling the lavers and preparing the altar. At about 9:00 am, they opened the gates and blew the silver trumpets to announce the commencement of the morning service. The service included slaying the sacrificial lamb, salting the sacrifice, trimming the lamp stand, burning the incense, presenting the burnt

offering and drink offering, blessing the people and blasting the silver trumpets. This was followed by the Psalm of the day, presented by the singers, accompanied by instrumental music. Immediately after the morning service, the Israelites might bring in their private sacrifices and offerings. It would occasionally continued till near the time for the evening sacrifice, which was about 2:30 pm. The evening service was similar to the morning service. It ended at about 4:00 pm. At night, the priests kept watch about the innermost places of the Temple, including the inner court and the Temple itself. They also opened and closed all the inner gates.

On a Sabbath day, there were the weekly renewal of the showbread and an additional burnt offering of two lambs. Before the actual Sabbath commenced, the service of the new course of priests and Levites had already begun. After the evening service, the outgoing course handed over the keys of the sanctuary, the holy vessels, and everything else they had in charge to the new course. At sunset on Friday, the Sabbath began. Immediately followed was the renewal of the showbread. It had been prepared by the incoming course before the Sabbath itself, in one of the side chambers of the Temple. Although the service of the incoming priests had begun, that of the outgoing had not yet completely finished. In fact, the outgoing priests offered the morning sacrifice on the Sabbath (Saturday morning), and then the incoming course performed the evening sacrifice. Both courses spent the Sabbath in the Temple. The Sabbath service was the same as on other days, except that at the close of the morning sacrifice two additional lambs were offered, along with its appropriate meal and drink offerings

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(Numbers 28:9-10). When the Sabbath was over, the outgoing course left the Temple and parted from each other with a farewell. On New Moons and other festivals, there were additional rituals to be observed according to the Law.

The Duties of the Singers and Musicians

The singers and musicians were selected and set apart to their assigned function. There were a total of 288 singers (1 Chronicles 25:7-31) and 4,000 musicians (1 Chronicles 23:5). They were also divided into 24 courses. Therefore, each course had 12 singers and more than 160 musicians. Unlike the singers, the 160 musicians came from several families. The ministry was subdivided among the families, and only one family of 20 to 30 musicians accompanied the 12-voice choir. The real service of praise in the Temple was only with the voice. The instrumental music served only to accompany and sustain the song. The musical instruments used were mainly the Nevel (harp) and the Kinnor (lyre). The silver trumpets used in the Temple, blown by priests only, were not part of the instrumental music, but were intended for assembling Israel to worship at the Temple. The other musical instrument mentioned was the cymbal. But this "*sounding brass*" and "*tinkling cymbal*" also formed no part of the Temple music itself and served only as the signal to begin that part of the service. The Levite choir offered praises in the morning and evening services. They were trained in singing and skillful (1 Chronicles 25:6-7), and were free from other duties (1 Chronicles 9:33).

The Duties of the Priests' Assistants

Of the various classes of Levites, the priests' assistants were the most numerous. They were in subordination to the priests. It had been their duty to look after the sacred garments and vessels, the storehouses and their contents, and the preparation of the showbread, of the meal offerings, of the spices, etc. In general, they were to assist the priests in their work, to clean the sanctuary, and to take charge of the treasuries (1 Chronicles 23:28-32).

The Duties of the Gatekeepers

The gatekeepers assumed the responsibilities of policing the Temple and guarding the outer gates and the storehouse, day and night. The laws of Levitical cleanness were most rigidly enforced upon worshippers and priests. If a leper, or anyone who was defiled had entered into the Temple area, or any priest officiated in a state of uncleanness, he would, if discovered, be dragged out and killed.

4CALL NO MAN FATHER: To understand why the charge does not work, one must first understand the use of the word "father" in reference to our earthly fathers. No one would deny a little girl the opportunity to tell someone that she loves her father. Common sense tells us that Jesus wasn't forbidding this type of use of the word "father." In fact, to forbid it would rob the address "Father" of its meaning when applied to God, for there would no longer be any earthly counterpart for the analogy of divine Fatherhood. The concept of God's role as Father would be meaningless if we obliterated the concept of earthly fatherhood. But in the Bible the concept of fatherhood is not restricted to just our earthly fathers and God. It is used to refer to people other than biological or legal fathers and is used as a sign of respect to those with whom we have a special relationship. For example, Joseph tells his brothers of a special fatherly relationship God had given him with the king of Egypt: "*So it was not you who sent me here, but God; and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt*" (Gen. 45:8). Job indicates he played a fatherly role with the less fortunate: "*I was a father to the poor, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know*" (Job 29:16). And God Himself declares that He will give a fatherly role to Eliakim, the steward of the house of David: "*In that day I will call my servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah . . . and I will clothe him with [a] robe, and will bind [a] girdle on him, and will commit . . . authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah*" (Isa. 22:20-21). This type of fatherhood applies not only to those who are wise counselors (like Joseph) or benefactors (like Job) or both (like Eliakim); it also applies to those who have a fatherly spiritual relationship with one. For example, Elisha cries, "*My father, my father!*" to Elijah as the latter is carried up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kgs. 2:12). Later, Elisha himself is called a father by the king of Israel (2 Kgs. 6:21).

A Change with the New Testament?

Some Protestants argue that this usage changed with the New Testament—that while it may have been permissible to call certain men "*father*" in the Old Testament, since the time of Christ, it's no longer allowed. This argument fails for several reasons. **1)** As we've seen, the imperative "*call no man father*" does not apply to one's biological father. It also doesn't exclude calling one's ancestors "*father*," as is shown in Acts 7:2, where Stephen refers to "*our father Abraham*," or in Romans 9:10, where Paul speaks of "*our father Isaac*." **2)** There are numerous examples in the New Testament of the term "*father*" being used as a form of address and reference, even for men who are not biologically related to the speaker. There are, in fact, so many uses of "*father*" in the New Testament, that the objection to Catholics calling priests "*father*" must be wrong, as we shall see. **3)** A careful examination of the context of Matthew 23 shows that Jesus didn't intend for His words here to be understood literally. The whole passage reads, "*But you are not to be called 'rabbi,' for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called 'masters,' for you have one master, the Christ*" (Matt. 23:8-10). The first problem is that although Jesus seems to prohibit the use of the term "*teacher*," in Matthew 28:19-20, Christ himself appointed certain men to be teachers in His Church: "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*"

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Paul speaks of his commission as a teacher: “*For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle . . . a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth*” (1 Tim. 2:7); “*For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher*” (2 Tim. 1:11). He also reminds us that the Church has an office of teacher: “*God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, and third teachers*” (1 Cor. 12:28); and “*his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers*” (Eph. 4:11). There is no doubt that Paul was not violating Christ’s teaching in Matthew 23 by referring so often to others as “*teachers*.” Fundamentalists themselves slip up on this point by calling all sorts of people “*doctor*”; for example, professors and scientists who have Ph.D. degrees (i.e., doctorates). What they fail to realize is that “*doctor*” is simply the Latin word for “*teacher*.” Even “*Mister*” and “*Mistress*” (“*Mrs.*”) are forms of the word “*master*,” also mentioned by Jesus. So if His words in Matthew 23 were meant to be taken literally, Fundamentalists would be just as guilty for using the word “*teacher*” and “*doctor*” and “*mister*” as Catholics for saying “*father*.” But clearly, that would be a misunderstanding of Christ’s words.

What Did Jesus Mean?

Jesus criticized Jewish leaders who love “the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and salutations in the market places, and being called ‘*rabbi*’ *by men*” (Matt. 23:6–7). He was using hyperbole (exaggeration) to show the scribes and Pharisees how sinful and proud they were for not looking humbly to God as the source of all authority and fatherhood and teaching, and instead setting themselves up as the ultimate authorities, father figures, and teachers. Christ used hyperbole often, for example when he declared, “*If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell*” (Matt. 5:29, cf. 18:9; Mark 9:47). Christ certainly did not intend this to be applied literally, for otherwise all Christians would be blind amputees! (cf. 1 John 1:8; 1 Tim. 1:15). Jesus is not forbidding us to call men “*fathers*” who actually are such—either literally or spiritually. **He is warning people against inaccurately attributing fatherhood—or a particular kind or degree of fatherhood—to those who do not have it.** As the apostolic example shows, some individuals genuinely do have a spiritual fatherhood, meaning that they can be referred to as spiritual fathers. What must not be done is to confuse their form of spiritual paternity with that of God. Ultimately, God is our supreme protector, provider, and instructor. Correspondingly, it is wrong to view any individual other than God as having these roles. Throughout the world, some people have been tempted to look upon religious leaders who are mere mortals as if they were an individual’s supreme source of spiritual instruction, nourishment, and protection. The tendency to turn mere men into “*gurus*” is worldwide. This was also a temptation in the Jewish world of Jesus’ day, when famous rabbinical leaders, especially those who founded important schools, such as Hillel and Shammai, were highly exalted by their disciples. It is this elevation of an individual man—the formation of a “*cult of personality*” around Him—of which Jesus is speaking when He warns against attributing to someone an undue role as master, father, or teacher. He is not forbidding the perfunctory use of honorifics nor forbidding us to recognize that the person *does* have a role as a spiritual father and teacher. The example of His own apostles shows us that.

The Apostles Show the Way

The New Testament is filled with examples of and references to spiritual father-son and father-child relationships. It is worth quoting some of them here. Paul regularly referred to Timothy as his child: “*Therefore I sent to you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ*” (1 Cor. 4:17); “*To Timothy, my true child in the faith: grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord*” (1 Tim. 1:2); “*To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord*” (2 Tim. 1:2). He also referred to Timothy as his son: “*This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare*” (1 Tim 1:18); “*You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim. 2:1); “*But Timothy’s worth you know, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel*” (Phil. 2:22). Paul also referred to other of his converts in this way: “*To Titus, my true child in a common faith: grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior*” (Titus 1:4); “*I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment*” (Philem. 10). None of these men were Paul’s literal sons. Rather, Paul is emphasizing his spiritual fatherhood with them.

Spiritual Fatherhood

Perhaps the most pointed New Testament reference to the theology of the spiritual fatherhood of priests is Paul’s statement, “**I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel**” (1 Cor. 4:14–15).