



Date: October 27, 2024

Speaker: Sam Rainer

Series: King Jesus

Message: The Dark Religion of Legalism

Reflect:

- What's a funny or memorable rule you were expected to follow growing up, but didn't fully understand at the time?
- Have you ever had an experience where someone's actions didn't match their words? How did that make you feel?

Encounter:

- In Matthew 23:3, Jesus acknowledges that the religious leaders "sit in Moses' seat" and should be listened to, but not imitated. What does this say about the difference between teaching and living out faith?
- Jesus condemns the Pharisees for focusing on appearances while neglecting their hearts (Matthew 23:25-28). How does this warning apply to the way we live out our faith today?
- The "seven woes" (Matthew 23:13-36) are strong rebukes. Why do you think Jesus uses such harsh language here? What can we learn from this about speaking truth in love?

Transform:

- What practical steps can you take this week to guard yourself from falling into the trap of legalism?

- How can our church community cultivate authenticity and grace rather than focusing on rules and appearances?

Related Passages:

- **Matthew 6:1-4** – This passage also deals with hypocrisy, encouraging believers to do good without seeking public recognition.
- **Luke 18:9-14** – The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector emphasizes humility and authenticity over self-righteousness. Micah 6:8 – “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good... to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.”
- **Isaiah 1:10-17** – In this passage, God rejects empty rituals and calls for genuine worship through justice and compassion.

Interesting Facts and Tidbits:

- **Seat of Moses** – This was an actual chair in the synagogue, symbolizing the authority to interpret God’s law. It highlights the role of teachers as spiritual gatekeepers.
- **Pharisees’ Origin:** The Pharisees began during the intertestamental period, initially to protect Jewish faith from foreign influence. Their strict adherence to the law grew into oppressive legalism over time.
- **Wordplay in Matthew 23:24:** Jesus uses a clever Aramaic pun with the words “camel” (gamla) and “gnat” (galma) to highlight the absurdity of the Pharisees’ priorities.
- **High Church vs. Low Church:** The sermon touches on this distinction, explaining that Jesus is not criticizing religious practices themselves but the misuse of religious authority for self-promotion.

Additional Discussion Questions:

- What are some areas where we tend to elevate personal preferences to the level of spiritual truth? How can we avoid this?

- How do we ensure that we extend grace to others without compromising truth?
- What role should accountability play in the church, and how can it be done in a way that builds people up rather than tears them down?

Key Terms:

- **Legalism:** A strict adherence to laws, rules, or moral codes, often accompanied by the intent to control or judge others. In the sermon, legalism refers to the Pharisees' oppressive demands and emphasis on external behavior over inner devotion.
- **Hypocrisy:** Definition: The act of pretending to have moral standards or beliefs that one's actions contradict. A hypocrite says one thing but does another.
- **Seat of Moses:** An actual chair in the synagogue that symbolized authority to interpret the Law of Moses. This term reflects the religious leaders' position of influence over the people.
- **Seven Woes:** A series of pronouncements by Jesus, expressing sorrow or judgment. In Matthew 23, the seven woes denounce the Pharisees' hypocrisy, pride, and legalism.
- **Whitewashed Tombs:** metaphor Jesus uses to describe people who appear righteous on the outside but are spiritually dead on the inside (Matthew 23:27).