

Not a Fan

Following Jesus or Following the Rules?

Matthew 23

Tell the story of Matt Emmons who shot at the wrong target at the 2004 Olympics 50 meter three position rifle event. All he needed to do was hit the target. Instead of winning the gold he finished in eighth place.

This is a picture of what happens to a lot of fans. It's not a question of their effort or desire. They are following hard. Here is the problem; it's not Jesus they are following. Without realizing it they are aiming at the wrong target. Instead of following Jesus they are following religious rules and ritual. They have confused the target.

In Matthew 23 Jesus is preaching one of his last sermons here on earth and it is a good one. He takes aim at the religious leaders. He doesn't hold anything back.

This sermon is traditionally called "The Seven Woes."

This indictment against those religious leaders should serve as a warning to those fans who consider themselves to be followers because of their religious rule keeping.

- Jesus is addressing the religious ruling body called the Sanhedrin. In the Sanhedrin there are two different groups called the Sadducees and Pharisees. And these two groups did not get along.
- When interpreting scripture the Sadducees were very liberal, and the Pharisees were conservative. The Sadducees served the role of Chief Priest and Elder. If you were a Sadducee, it meant you were born into that position.
- To be a Pharisee didn't depend on your family but on your work ethic. And what I have noticed is fans fit into one of these two camps.

- Some fans are like the Sadducees. Their faith was something they were born into. It's been more about honoring your heritage than surrendering your heart.
- On the other hand, some fans are like the Pharisees. They would measure their faith by their hard work at learning and following their denominations rules and rituals. Even though you are saying and doing the right things, it isn't a true reflection of who you really are.
- How many of you have heard of Andre Agassi? For years he was one of the top tennis players in the world. I saw him play in Memphis in the early 90's. He turned pro when he was 16 and has won 8 grand slam tournaments in his 20 year career.
- There was a magazine article that read, "My secret life." Turns out Andre Hated tennis. He never did. Agassi wrote, "I never chose this life." On the outside you would never know his heart wasn't in it. He put in countless hours of practice and battled for championships. He was really good at what he did.
- But he was wearing a mask. See you can pray the prayers and sing the songs, you are just going through the motions. You're putting on a good face but it's not real. Your heart isn't in it.
- So my question to all of us this morning is: Are you more focused on the outside than the inside?
- The main problem Jesus had with the religious leaders was they were hypocrites. He called them that 8 times to their faces.
- The word hypocrite comes from the Greek ancient classical theater. Greek actors were called hypocrites. The actors would play several different parts in the same play often having to wear several different masks at a time.

- Fans get caught up on what people see on the outside but it's not real, it's only a mask. What people see doesn't reflect who they really are. Jesus said in vs.5 "Everything they do is for show." (NLT)
- Jesus said in vs.1-3 Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples: The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach."
- The problem with these teachers is that what they were teaching wasn't a reflection of who they were.
 - In vs 27-28 Jesus says, "You are like a white washed tomb, which is beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy."
- That would often describe the faith of a fan. On the inside their faith has grown cold and is dying, but they are determined to keep up appearances.
- Usually fans prefer rules over relationship. Vs. 13 "woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut up the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to."
 - Fans choose laws over love! Fans would give their time to following religious rituals but would neglect to show love to people around them, which was kind of the point to the rules in the first place.
- Fans prefer guilt over grace. Vs 4. "Jesus said, they tie heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders."

- The key word for guilt is “do.” We try to do enough to make up for our mistakes and earn God’s favor. The key word for grace is “done.” Our punishment was taken by Christ. He has made a way where there was no way so that we live a freedom of what has been “done.”
- So let’s not lose sight of what really matters the most. Giving ourselves to Christ completely and stop aiming at the wrong target. Jesus is our prize and nothing else will do!!