

Matthew 23:1-12

Authentic role models

Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of not doing what they teach. He tells the crowd and his disciples that they have but one teacher, and one Father in heaven. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled; the humble will be exalted.



Bible notes



Jesus has told several parables that are increasingly open in their criticism of the religious leaders. The 'two sons' (21:28-32) parable highlights their refusal to change their minds concerning his message, despite all the evidence presented to them. The 'wicked tenants' (21:33-45) tells and foretells their treatment of prophets and of Jesus himself, and warns that the kingdom of God will be given to those who live as the people of God. The 'wedding banquet' (22:1-14) points out their refusal to join in with what God is doing now. In this week's passage, Jesus abandons stories and speaks directly, not to, but about the religious leaders: do as they say, not as they do. They have learning, and authority to teach the instruction passed on by God to Moses, so learn from them. But don't follow their example, because they are concerned about appearances – making a show of practising their religion, wearing oversized prayer shawls (that have fringes, v.5) and reminders of the law (the phylacteries, v.5 – small boxes worn on the arm and forehead during prayer, containing verses from the Torah). They want honour, respect, accolades and titles, but have forgotten that we are all learners, all disciples, and are there to point others to God. Their blind spots are so significant that they are keeping people out of God's kingdom.

The religious leaders were perhaps unaware of what people saw in them as role models. Experts in their subject, they had lost sight of the need for authentic behaviour to accompany this knowledge. What do people see when they look at us? Who are we following, and how can we become aware of our blind spots? The religious leaders needed someone to ask them these questions. Jesus does so forcibly.



Using images and headlines from newspapers and magazines, create a **Hope collage**. Look for stories that speak of challenge, crisis or injustice, and make these the centre of the collage. Also look for stories that show hopeful responses and put them around the inner set. Reflect on the words Jesus says to his followers in the Gospel reading, and decide on a headline for your collage. Cobble together the words or letters cut from the papers/magazines.

First impressions

- What is the purpose of a mirror such as this one?
- How can you discover your blind spots?
- What might you find if you look into them?



REFLECT

Re-read the Gospel passage, pausing after each phrase or sentence to reflect on Jesus' words. Be honest with yourself, looking for **blind spots** in your daily living. Are there times when you do not practice what you teach/believe? When do you lay burdens on others, or fail to lift them? Pray: God, thank you for your grace and forgiveness. Please give me understanding and insight to see more clearly the opportunities to serve others. Amen.

A prayer for others

Loving God, we thank you for those who inspire us: those who are strong and kind, those who are wise and humble, those who are leaders and listeners, who make the world a better place. Amen.

REFLECT



Sing along with this worship song: 'Not made for the harbour', Andy Flanagan <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mug6ierJdOs>
Reflect: What does 'the sea' symbolise in your life, e.g. work, school/college, clubs, sports teams? How can you be an example of Christian faith in these places?

Write

On a mirror, use a dry erase marker to write the words 'Reflect Jesus'. Think about ways that you can copy Jesus' example today.