

Scripture: Matthew 15:1-20, and Matthew 23

Verse: These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Matthew 15:8

Jesus had many encounters with many people from many different backgrounds. And as Jesus said many times, He came for those who were LOST. God had said through His prophets for many years before Jesus came to earth that His people had become lost like lost sheep; they had lost their way, and needed to be found. That's why so many encounters with Jesus ended with great joy – those He healed, and taught, and spent time with were like lost sheep that had been found.

The Bible tells us that Jesus had compassion on the lost. They needed a Savior and He came to be that Savior. He had compassion, and they found mercy.

There was one group of people who had encounters with Jesus that did NOT end in joy and happiness. Instead those encounters ended in conflict. These were people who did not think they were lost at all. In fact, they thought they knew the way to be "righteous." (righteousness means to be perfect in God's eyes). These were the religious leaders of the day. People like the scribes (also called teachers of the law) who studied every word of the law given by Moses and the Levites to tell people how to be perfect. Then there were the Pharisees; they tried to do their very best to live every law perfectly so they would be seen as blameless in God's eyes (righteous). So, the scribes told everyone what it would take to live a PERFECT life, and Pharisees believed they actually did it!

Many religious leaders WANTED OTHER PEOPLE TO BELIEVE THAT THEY HAD LIVED PERFECT LIVES. In fact by looking very righteous in public. They tried to convince everyone that they were perfect. However, in their hearts, they knew they were not perfect.

So that means they were being hypocrites. The word 'hypocrite' means 'pretender' someone who is pretending to be something they are not. It's like wearing a mask.

A person could wear a tiger mask, and want everyone to believe they are a tiger. And they might even fool some people (probably not very many). But in their own hearts, they know they are not really tigers.

Jesus knew that is what the Pharisees were doing when they tried to make people believe they lived perfect lives. As a result, Jesus did not have compassion on the Pharisees.

At the same time, the Pharisees were upset with Jesus, because He didn't seem to be impressed at all with their version of righteousness.

This led to great conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. They accused Him NOT following Moses' law and of being a son of Satan (even though He proved to them that He was God who could heal AND forgive sins). So instead of mercy, Jesus showed JUDGEMENT to the hypocritical religious leaders. He called them 'blind guides' 'hypocrites.' He said they were like a dish that had been washed on the outside but was still dirty on the inside.

To summarize their condition, Jesus quoted Isaiah who prophesied: "These people honor me with their lips, but their HEARTS are far from me." (Matthew 15: 8)

But even after judging the religious leaders, Jesus showed His heart of compassion when He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who were sent to you. How often have I longed to gather your children like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. **But you were not willing.**

The religious leaders trusted themselves more than they trusted God. That is why they were not willing to seek mercy from Jesus. Jesus shows compassion on those who are willing to let Him change their heart. That is why we who know Jesus pray constantly for those who don't yet know Him, that they will not pretend to be good, but turn to Jesus and let His goodness change them.

Instructions

- Print out page
- Cut tiger (rough or exact).
- Cut out tiger's eyes
- Paste or tape the phrase 'I'm not really a Tiger' to the back of the mask.

I'm not really a Tiger

