

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL DECEMBER 12, 2013

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SCRIPTURE

MATTHEW 23:13-26

13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them. 15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath.' 17 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred? 18 And you say, 'Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on the altar is bound by the oath.' 19 How blind you are! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? 20 So whoever swears by the altar, swears by it and by everything on it; 21 and whoever swears by the sanctuary, swears by it and by the one who dwells in it; 22 and whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by the one who is seated upon it.

23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!

25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean.

DEVOTIONAL

Woe to you, blind guides! Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You blind fools!

Jesus, the healer of so many blind people, is frustrated at the blindness he so clearly sees in the scribes and Pharisees—a blindness that is a willful act of not seeing rather than a physical impairment that prevents sight. The scribes and Pharisees are blind because they are focusing on the wrong things in their religious practice—the gold, the gifts, and the outside of the cup. The justice, mercy, and faith that should be clearly visible are hardly a noticeable blur in the background.

As Christmas approaches we spend a lot of time polishing the outside of our cups—mailing cards and invitations, decorating sanctuaries, and producing pageants. Meanwhile the sacred gift of Jesus Christ remains unnoticed in a remote corner. Too often, we exhaust ourselves with the lesser things and forget that which is greater. Perhaps this is the year to unwrap the gift of Christ's justice, mercy, and faith first.

PRAYER

Holy God, gives us clarity of vision this Advent and Christmas. Allow us to focus on the greater gift of Christ, your Word as flesh among us. Open our eyes so that we may see opportunities for justice, mercy, and faith during the holidays and every day. In Christ's name. Amen.

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