



SPORTS IN FOCUS

Becoming Great

Matthew 23:1-12 • Lesson Eleven

READY

- When is the first time you noticed other players or coaches praying before or after competition? What was your response?
- Is it possible to praying during the competition? Why or why not?

SET

Context of Matthew 23

The scribes and Pharisees were enemies to the gospel of Christ, and therefore to the salvation of the souls of men. They had gone beyond any legitimate authority and were adding human tradition to the word of God. This is the reason Jesus condemned them. They were prone to bind “heavy burdens” or extra biblical traditions on the shoulders of others.

Keys to Text

The scribes and Pharisees explained the law of Moses, and enforced obedience to it. They are charged with hypocrisy in religion. We can only judge according to outward appearance; but God searches the heart. They made phylacteries. These were scrolls of paper or parchment that included four paragraphs of the law, to be worn on their foreheads and left arms. They made these phylacteries broad, that they might be thought more zealous for the law than others.

GO

Read Matthew 23:1-12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they clove the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

- What stood out to you in this passage? Are there any modern-day Pharisees? What lessons can be learned from this passage?

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After Houston won back-to-back NBA titles in '94 and '95, Coach Rudy Tomjanovich uttered a profoundly enduring statement, “Never underestimate the heart of a champion.” His team fought back from adversity and won it all a second time. In sports, great performances are usually about the heart. The religious leaders of the day consisted of Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes. Their beliefs and functions differed a bit, but they had a couple of things in common. Most of them were proud and self-righteous. Their hearts weren't right. When they prayed they didn't pray to God from the heart. Jesus made it clear. Don't pray to please people and don't pray for their praise. Pray to become intimate with God. Then, as you grow in intimacy with the Father and as you respond to His leading, you'll become His champion. You'll champion His causes and you'll champion His name.