

- Over the last few weeks we have witnessed Jesus attack the Scribes and the Pharisees in a very pointed direct way. We might express our opinions openly in the coffee shop but we would never be that honest in public. Jesus has been working himself up into a frenzy of emotion and now he lets fly completely. He does not hold back. There is no disguising his meaning. You people are a bunch of hypocrites! You guard your seat of power. You admonish and dictate to the people how they should live, but you do not live it yourselves. You are all walking contradictions. You proclaim one thing to us but you proclaim something completely different to yourselves. Instead of helping us to rise up to God, you have tethered us. You have chained us to the ground.
- Whenever I listen to Jesus in full rhetoric I am interested to see how the Apostles are responding to this. They must have been surprised at his brutal honesty. Now they are seeing Jesus as he really is. If you wish to be a follower of mine then you must turn from your present journey. Turn your back on obedience for the sake of obedience. You will not get close to God by obeying rules that intimidate you. Stop living like this just because that is what everyone else is doing. Jesus calls for a revolutionary change of heart. He challenges his followers to follow Him. Give up your legalism. Let me teach you how to come close to God without fear of reproach.
- The Jews decided a long time ago to make themselves into a great nation. They would make themselves great by making themselves great in the eyes of God. Their method to become great before God was to observe the Laws of God perfectly. God could only applaud their dedication. We could adapt the words of God spoken to Jesus in the Jordan river, and apply them to the Jews. “You are my beloved children. In you I am well pleased.”
- The Jews have every right to consider that they are a great nation in the eyes of God. The problem Jesus is highlighting is that somewhere along the way the perfect observance of the Law became the reward, became their pearl of great price. They forgot about their intention, which was to come close to God. Because of their worship of the Law they heaped a huge burden on the people.
- Previously, they asked Jesus to identify which was the greatest commandment. We remember that Jesus said that there were two great commandments. One was to love God and the other was to love your neighbor as yourself. He focused on giving proper respect to God and proper respect to people. Because the Scribes and the Pharisees put their focus on the Law only, they forgot their intention. They proclaimed that by observing the law alone you can get closer to God.

- In the gospel Jesus condemns public displays of piety. He has no time for spiritual selfies. He has no time for embellishments or the trappings of office. Does our worship of God help us to feel that we are getting closer to God? Or, do we make people afraid. Did we say to you, you will never get to see God face to face because you are a terrible sinner? If that is what we are doing, then that is unfair and unwarranted, and we must correct it.
- Hopefully we can say the words Paul says to the Thessalonians: “We were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children. With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us. You recall, brothers and sisters, our toil and drudgery. Working night and day in order not to burden any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. And, for this reason we too give thanks to God, that in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God which is now at work in you who believe.”