

Matthew 23:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

Analysis

And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. This verse continues Jesus' denunciation of scribal and Pharisaical hypocrisy, exposing their craving for public recognition and honor. The "greetings in the markets" (aspasamous en tais agorais, ἀσπασμοὺς ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς) refers to elaborate, honorific salutations in public spaces where maximum visibility could be achieved. Markets were the ancient equivalent of public squares—centers of commercial and social interaction.

The title "Rabbi" (rabbi, ῥαββί) literally means "my great one" or "my master," a term of respect for teachers of the Law. The repetition "Rabbi, Rabbi" emphasizes their insatiable appetite for recognition and their manipulation of religion to gain social status. This wasn't about legitimate respect for teaching office but about pride and self-exaltation masquerading as piety.

Jesus' critique targets the heart attitude beneath outward religious performance. The scribes and Pharisees had transformed God's law from a means of knowing and serving Him into a platform for self-promotion. Their religion was performative rather than transformative, focused on human applause rather than divine approval. This warning remains relevant wherever religious leaders use ministry as a vehicle for personal glory rather than service.

Historical Context

In first-century Judaism, rabbis held positions of significant social authority and respect. The title "Rabbi" emerged during the Second Temple period as formal rabbinical schools developed. Scribes were professional students and teachers of the Torah, while Pharisees were a religious movement emphasizing strict Torah observance and oral tradition.

Public marketplaces in ancient cities served as social hubs where people gathered not just for commerce but for news, discussion, and social interaction. Being greeted respectfully in such public settings signaled social status and influence. The scribes and Pharisees' elaborate religious garments (verse 5) and their preference for prominent synagogue seats (verse 6) formed a pattern of status-seeking behavior.

Jesus delivered this scathing critique publicly in the temple courts, shortly before His crucifixion. His confrontation with religious leaders had been escalating throughout His ministry, but Matthew 23 represents His most comprehensive and severe denunciation. The historical irony is profound: those who claimed to represent God rejected the very Messiah they claimed to await, their spiritual pride blinding them to truth.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. In what ways do modern religious leaders seek public recognition and status rather than serving humbly?
2. How can we guard against using spiritual service as a platform for personal glory?

3. What is the difference between appropriate recognition of leadership and the pride Jesus condemns here?
4. How does our culture's emphasis on platform and influence tempt us toward the Pharisees' error?
5. What practical steps can we take to ensure our ministry is God-centered rather than self-centered?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	τοὺς	ἀσπασμοὺς	ἐν	ταῖς	ἀγοραῖς	καὶ	καλεῖσθαι
And	G3588	greetings	in	G3588	the markets	And	to be called
G2532		G783	G1722		G58	G2532	G2564
ὑπὸ	τῶν	ἀνθρώπων	Ῥαββί.	Ῥαββί.			
of	G3588	men	Rabbi	Rabbi			
G5259		G444	G4461	G4461			

Additional Cross-References

John 1:38 (Parallel theme): Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?

John 1:49 (Parallel theme): Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

John 6:25 (Parallel theme): And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?

John 20:16 (Parallel theme): Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

John 3:2 (Parallel theme): The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

John 3:26 (Parallel theme): And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

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