

Moses' Seat

(Sermon Notes)

by Warren Zehrung

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Today, we will be discussing "Moses' Seat." The title of today's sermon comes from Jesus' own words where He said:

Matthew 23:2-3 The scribes and the Pharisees sit in **Moses' Seat**: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.

On the surface, it would appear from this Scriptural excerpt that Jesus demanded of His disciples, a strict adherence to the words of the scribes and the Pharisees;

Let's look at the overall approach that Jesus consistently maintained toward the Pharisees. We'll breeze through the Gospel accounts – briefly pin-pointing Jesus interactions with the religious leaders of His time. To begin with, let's back up and put Jesus' words in their proper setting. We do not want to miss out on what was going on with the Sadducees, Scribes, Pharisees, and so forth... Let's look at Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Pharisees and Sadducees taught commandments of men which made void the commandments of God.

Matthew 15:6 ...Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

Matthew 15:7 Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying,

Matthew 15:8 This people draw nigh unto me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

Jesus was quoting Isaiah as He often did.

Isaiah 29:13-14 And the Lord said, 'Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are **far from me**, and their reverence of me is a commandment of men learned by rote; therefore, behold, I will again do marvelous things with this people, wonderful and marvelous; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.'

Jesus was saying that the religious leaders missed the deeper **spiritual truth** which Moses intended; they "strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."

Let's go back to Matthew where Jesus is telling the Pharisees that by their very words, they corrupted themselves:

Matthew 15:11 [It is] **Not** that which goes into the mouth that defiles a man; but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.

Jesus was being very explicit, stating it clearly and in detail, leaving no room for confusion or doubt, and His words **were not lost** on the Pharisees.

Matthew 15:12 Then came His disciples, and said unto him, Know thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?

The Pharisees teachings were like plants which must be uprooted since they were not planted by God.

Matthew 15:13 But He answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall **be rooted up**.

Matthew 15:14 Let them alone: they are blind leaders of the blind.

Put this in your notes where Jesus expounds on the Pharisees' blindness.

Matthew 23:26 Thou **blind Pharisee**, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

Matthew 23:27 **Woe unto you**, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

Matthew 23:28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of **hypocrisy and iniquity**.

...and He said a lot more about the Pharisees...

We are starting with this "flash-back in time" so that we can see clearly what Jesus said over and over about the scribes and the Pharisees. This will help us in letting the Bible interpret the Bible – because that one verse sure sounded like Jesus was telling His disciples to do everything the scribes and the Pharisees taught.

Matthew 16:6 Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and **beware** of the **leaven** of the **Pharisees** and of the **Sadducees**.

These two – the **Sadducees** and the **Pharisees** – are opposing religious groups that Jesus lumps together because of their double-dealing with the word of God. Jesus considered the teachings of these leaders to be **leaven**, which left unchallenged, would leaven the whole.

Matthew 16:11 How is it that ye do not understand that I spoke it not to you concerning **bread**, that ye should beware of the leaven of the **Pharisees** and of the **Sadducees**? [Both Pharisees and Sadducees].

Matthew 16:12 Then understood they how that He bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the **doctrine** [teachings, beliefs, words] of the **Pharisees** and of the **Sadducees**.

Verse 12 is a very clear statement showing that Jesus was **not telling** His disciples, in Matthew 23:3, to obey, observe, or do what the Pharisees bid them **observe and do**.

Matthew 19:3 The **Pharisees** also came unto Him, tempting Him, and saying unto Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

Did Jesus despise the priests? – Of course not – He fully respected their office. Please understand this: While Jesus still lived, the Old Testament priesthood was still viable – and Jesus fully respected that authority.

Jesus had just healed a leper and made him clean (verse 2).

Matthew 8:4 And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the **priest**, and offer the gift that **Moses commanded**, for a testimony unto them.

It was only when Jesus died, and the temple ceased, and so did the Levitical priesthood, that there was a change in law. Paul said it like this:

Hebrews 7:12 For the **priesthood** being **changed**, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.

Jesus was telling the **chief priests and Pharisees** that – even though they were running things right then – they were about to **lose their positions**.

Matthew 21:43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall **be taken from you**, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

Revelation 11:15 The kingdom of the world has become the **kingdom of our Lord**, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.

Matthew21:44 And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

Matthew21:45 And when the **chief priests and Pharisees** had heard his parables, they perceived that he spoke of them.

Matthew21:46 But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

Matthew22:15 Then went the **Pharisees**, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.

Matthew22:17 Tell us therefore, What do you think? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?

Matthew22:18 But Jesus perceived their **wickedness**, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye **hypocrites**?

Matthew22:19 Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.

Matthew22:20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

Matthew22:21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

Jesus said that **civil government** has its place – do not revolt against it – it is ordained of God.

Romans 13:1 ..."there is no authority except from God."

Jesus told Pilate in John 19:11, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you **from above**." [From God]

Romans 13:2 God clearly establishes civil government. Therefore, we are responsible for obeying civil authority when it does not violate God's law, for in doing so we are obeying God.

Matthew22:22 When they had heard these words, they marveled, **and left Him**, and went their way.

They took turns piling-on Jesus with their attacks.

Matthew22:23 The same day came to Him the **Sadducees**, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him,

Matthew22:34 But when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the **Sadducees to silence**, they were gathered together.

Matthew22:35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, **tempting** him, and saying,

Matthew22:41 While the **Pharisees** were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

Matthew22:42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David.

Jesus was easily able to tie the lawyer in a knot – because he was not skilled in the Scriptures.

Matthew22:46 And no man was able to answer him a word, **neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions**.

Jesus silenced them all – now He had to give His disciples the **right balance** – because you do not throw the baby out with the bath-water. Jesus had to tell His disciples where truth derived from—and it was not from the scribes and the Pharisees (Matthew 23:3).

God's word is absolutely necessary – don't turn your back on God's Truth and Way.

Matthew23:1 Then spoke Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,

Matthew23:2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees **sit** in Moses' seat:

Matthew23:3 **All** therefore **whatsoever** they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

What is Jesus saying right here? This is **not** a **command to obey** the scribes and the Pharisees, because the rest of the chapter is a condemnation and denunciation of the things the scribes and the Pharisees believe and do. This dichotomy of meaning needs to be explained from the Scriptures.

Matthew23:4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

Matthew23:5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

Matthew23:6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

Matthew23:7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

Matthew23:8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

Matthew23:9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

Matthew23:10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

Matthew23:11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

Matthew23:12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Matthew23:13 But **woe** unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

Matthew 23:2-3 The scribes and the Pharisees sit in **Moses' Seat**: All therefore **whatsoever** they bid you observe, that observe and do.

Brethren, let's look at the **words of Jesus** and make some sense of them.

The question arises for us, "Does the ministry of the Church of God **sit in Moses' Seat today**, and must the brethren do everything they tell you to do?"

Does the ministry make all the rules and call all the shots? Is Jesus telling us today that those who sit in Moses' Seat have carte blanche freedom to demand **obedience** from one and all? No. They do not. Too many assume that the scribes and Pharisees, and subsequently the ministry today, are the inheritors of a godly authority to **rule as they see fit** – and a cursory reading of this King James Translation seems to support that conjecture.

In the Worldwide Church of God and some of its branches today, the ministry believes that they have the authority to rule in the Church in this same way – and whatever they stipulate – it must be observed.

Let me give you an example:

There was a Pastor in the Worldwide Church of God who was my superior – let's say my "boss." It came to my attention that he, that Pastor, was acting in an **unjust** manner toward one of the brethren. What the Pastor was doing was out and out – **wrong!** It was unfair, dishonest, underhanded, and unwarranted. It was sinful and cruel.

I thought that if I **interceded** on behalf of the man who was being wronged, the Pastor would relent and back down. To my surprise, the Pastor doubled-down and "set me straight."

He said, and I quote, "I'm the Pastor, **I can do what I want.**"

He had been taught that he sat in Moses' Seat, and that his **every capricious whim** must be followed and obeyed.

After all, didn't Jesus say in:

Matthew 23:3 **All**, therefore **whatsoever**, they bid you observe, that observe and **do**.

We live by **every** word of God, so it behooves us to know what the intent of Jesus' command means. Is Jesus saying that you must do what the Pastor tells you to do?

Where did the concept of **Moses' Seat** originate? Notice in this next verse – Exodus 18:13.

Exodus 18:13 And it came to pass on the morrow, that **Moses sat** to judge the people: and the people **stood** by Moses from the morning unto the evening.

Exodus 18:14 And when Moses' father-in-law [Jethro] saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? Why do you **sit** there thyself alone, and all the people **stand** by thee from morning unto even?

Exodus 18:15 And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God:

Exodus 18:16 When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws.

Exodus 18:17 And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good.

Exodus 18:18 Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.

Exodus 18:19 Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God:

Exodus 18:20 And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do.

Exodus 18:21 Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:

Exodus 18:22 And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee.

Exodus 18:23 If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace.

Exodus 18:24 So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said.

The priest's original position is clear from Scripture. In matters of an argument, the children of Israel were to come before the priest the Levite.

Deuteronomy 17:8 If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood [a family matter], between plea and plea [a legal matter], and between stroke and stroke [a fist fight], being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place [like a supreme court] which the LORD thy God shall choose;

Deuteronomy 17:9 And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment:

Deuteronomy 17:10 And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee:

Deuteronomy 17:11 According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left.

Deuteronomy 17:12 And the man that will do presumptuously [contempt of court], and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.

Deuteronomy 17:13 And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.

That is the origin of the **concept** of Moses' Seat. But there was not – an actual physical – judgment hall and actual **chair** that was passed down through the years to the time of Jesus Christ. Israel and Judah went into captivity, the Temple was destroyed, the Levitical Priesthood ceased to function...

That took place in an Old Testament setting – but we are the Church of the New Testament. Do the church leaders and Pastors today sit in Moses' chair?

Sharon and I were married in a big Catholic **Cathedral** – the biggest church building in the diocese.

'Cathedral' derives from the Greek. In the Greek, the word for seat is *kathedra*, and mainly because of its use here in Matthew 23:2, it has taken on the connotation of "seat of authority."

Our English word 'Cathedral' carries the idea of 'church authority.'

The phrase, 'Ex cathedra' is Latin for "from the chair - from the SEAT."

Roman Catholics believe that the pope speaks infallibly when speaking 'ex cathedra' on questions of faith or morals, such as when Pope Pius XII declared in 1950 that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was physically taken up to heaven after her death. Catholics have to believe Mary is in heaven because it was spoken "**from the chair – from the Seat.**"

What is the role of a minister of Jesus Christ today?

The apostle Paul said that the work of a minister in the Church is to serve the brethren in Godly love and to feed, nourish, protect, and care for the flock of God.

A true minister of Jesus Christ has a vital duty and an imperative obligation to lay down his life for the brethren – just as Jesus Christ did.

There remains a genuine need for ministers of Jesus Christ who **preach** and **teach** the Truth... to **counsel** according to the word of God... to **feed** the flock... to **marry** the young men and women... to **bury** the saints who sleep...

to **visit** the sick and the imprisoned... to **wash** the feet of the brethren – signifying a willingness to **lay** down his life... to **anoint** with oil so that the **sick** will be made well... to facilitate the ministry of **reconciliation**... to **return** those who have gone astray... for the **laying** on of hands, and **baptizing** those whom God calls... and there are **Feasts** to administer, and there is **Doctrine** to be preserved... **Questions** to be answered... **Encouragement** to be given... **babies** to bless, and the **Gospel** to warn the world, etc.

Paul admonished the ministry to,

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers [guardians], to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.

Is there a proper place for the ministry of Jesus Christ? The answer is an unequivocal, Yes!

The apostle Peter warned the ministers to never use coercion or constraint in their teaching and care of the flock. (1Peter 5:2)

A true minister of Jesus Christ must never exercise dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith you stand (2Corinthians 1:24).

A minister can do only what God has **already** commanded. We, the people of God, live by, and are bound by the rules of the Kingdom of God – even now.

In the past, Brethren were taught incorrectly that the ministry could **rule over their lives** and that if the ministry made a mistake – it was really not a mistake because God would set it right. Ministers made decisions in families' lives that should **only** have been made by the head of the family.

Too many ministers taught that their decisions – good or bad – were permitted and approved by God's authority. That is not the way it works.

Please understand this: No minister is ever above God's law. When a minister sins, he is not under the auspices, nor does he have the backing or approval of, God's authority.

God's authority, which begins with God the Father and flows down through Jesus Christ, extends to every member of the entire body of the Church of God – but **not** through any minister.

Not even if that minister claims to have received the baton, or the mantle of authority, and subsequently thinks that he rules over the brethren of the Church – in God's stead – in God's place.

Many brethren have been led to believe that organizational "Church authority" is God's authorization to be exercised and administered by the ministry. That is not the case. Ministers cannot be hard taskmasters who demand obedience to themselves.

Brethren have been told that their salvation was at stake if they did not yield to every **whim** of the Pastor, because he represents God on earth. That is a false teaching. We have got to get back to the truth of God.

There is no man between a Church member and Jesus Christ. There is no "presiding evangelist" between you and Jesus Christ – though that very thing is being taught.

Our loyalty is to Jesus Christ and His Father – anything less constitutes idolatry. Jesus is our advocate...

1John 2:1 We have an **advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

1Timothy 2:5 There is one God, and **one mediator** between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

God rules in our lives as His Spirit leads us. Nothing, or no one is able to supersede that relationship (Romans 8:14).

Every day we are faced with decisions of 'right' or 'wrong.' How can we be sure that we are pleasing in God's sight? John gives us the answer:

1John 3:22 Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep **His** commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

When we remain under God's authority – defined by His Law and His Commands, we can be sure that we are acting on **His** behalf.

However, anytime **anyone** infringes upon any of God's laws, statutes, judgments or perfect way, they have stepped away from God, and are not acting on His behalf, no matter how important and highly esteemed they might think they are.

Here is how to understand Matthew 23:1-2

Matthew 23:2-3 The scribes and the Pharisees **sit** in Moses' Seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do...

E. W. Bullinger's Bible has for the word **sit**, they, "**have taken their seat**" upon **Moses seat**.

A few other translations:

The Amplified Bible ...has: "The scribes and Pharisees **have seated themselves** in Moses' chair."

The Jubilee Bible ...has, "The scribes and the Pharisees **have sat down in Moses' seat**;

This then is the intent of these two verses: The meaning of the “seat of Moses” should be understood to represent **authority** to teach **what Moses taught**.

Jesus says the scribes and the Pharisees sat in self appointed positions. They ordained themselves. They took the authority unto themselves. They usurped Moses role.

Understand these two verses this way – and this is a paraphrase:

“The scribes and the Pharisees have taken **their seat** upon Moses seat and now, **all which [Moses] says unto you**, observe and do; but do **not** you after their works: because they **say**, and **do not**.”

We should note a clear distinction between what **he** [Moses] says to do, and what **they** (the scribes and the Pharisees) say to do.

Let me repeat that paraphrase of Matthew 23:2-3:

“The scribes and the Pharisees have taken **their seat** upon Moses seat and now, **all which [Moses] says unto you**, observe and do; but do **not** you after the works of the scribes and the Pharisees: because they **say**, and **do not**.”

We are to follow a minister's faith only as it complements and corresponds to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Paul updated this instruction for us in:

1Corinthians 11:1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also am [a follower] of Christ. [Not when I'm doing things my way.]

1Corinthians 11:2 Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I **delivered** them to you.

Paul did not write the ordinances, or make the judgments of God – he simply **passed** them on – he **delivered** them to the brethren.

Is some **headquarters** the head of every man?

Is some **corporate organization** the head of every man?

Is some **local Pastor** the head of every man – making his family's decisions, and telling the husband what he must or must not do?

Notice carefully:

1Corinthians 11:3 But I would have you know, that the head of every man **is Christ**; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God [the Father].

Moses' seat, for a time, was a representation of God's **heavenly throne** for old Israel.

Jesus supersedes Moses in that Jesus is the creator and Moses is a created person as we are. Paul put it this way in:

Hebrews 3:3 For this man [Jesus Christ] was counted worthy of **more glory** than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath built the house hath more honor than the house.

Yes, the priesthood has changed. This is in effect right now!

Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have **a great high priest**, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. [Christianity]

Hebrews 7:26 For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

Hebrews 8:1 Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;

Hebrews 10:21 And having an high priest over the house of God;

Though some men may **presume** to sit themselves on Moses seat – who would be so foolish as to sit himself on Christ's throne of the Majesty in the heavens?

Many brethren have suffered abuse or neglect at the hand of a hireling minister causing them to be less inclined to trust any other minister.

In the past, there have been many ministers who abused the brethren.

Some brethren are still hurt, angry, bitter, and resentful at the **Church of God** because of the treatment they and their families suffered at the hands of hard-fisted ministers.

Those ministers were hard taskmasters who demanded obedience to themselves – wrongly. Jesus knew that it would happen: And, because of certain men who have **crept in** among our brethren over the years, there has been a great deal of confusion, pain, and hurt. Innocent brethren were marked and disfellowshipped – put out of their family and congregations.

Those ministers have made a serious mistake.

Jude :4 There are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you have been badly hurt and persecuted by those ministers who took too much upon themselves – **what should you do about it?**

Jesus gives us **His example** of when authority has been destructive, cruel and out of control.

We are to be...

Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they **do not know** what they are doing.

Oh, they knew they were executing a man – but they did not understand that they were putting the Son of God to death.

And it was necessary that the Son of God die for the sins of the world – because it was the Plan of God that the **Lamb of God** be slain from the foundation of the world. (Revelation 13:8)

End: Moses' Seat