



Matthew 23:8–10

8 “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah.

Reflection

When he's preaching, Jesus occasionally uses people as illustrations. You might remember when Jesus was teaching his disciples about greatness in the kingdom of heaven in Matthew chapter 18 he called a little child to stand amongst his disciples. There they were, the Twelve, thinking about greatness and perhaps who amongst them would be the greatest and then Jesus places a small, and utterly dependant, little child amongst them. You can imagine him pointing at the little child when he said,

4 Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is using the same technique in today's passage, only today it isn't a small

child that he's pointing to as his example, but the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. They are standing right there, very visible, very prominent amongst the crowds of religious pilgrims who've come to hear Jesus preach in the temple courts in Jerusalem. In yesterday's passage Jesus put words to just how much they liked to stand out. You couldn't miss them amongst the crowds because of their long and flowing robes and their ornate phylacteries, little cylinders containing passages from the bible attached to their arms and foreheads, by leather cords that wrapped around and around. And this isn't to even speak of the tassels on their cloaks; it was like a competition amongst them to see whose were the longest. All Jewish males wore them, but theirs were something to behold. And then of course there were

the 'airs and graces', the way the crowds parted when they walked through, the way they expected the seats of honour at banquets and took the most important places in the synagogue. It was like there was an aura of greatness around them as they passed by and they loved it. Not a little child this time, today Jesus is pointing at them, when he says from yesterday's passage:

5 "Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.

You can almost see Jesus there, one hand pointing at the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who are no doubt red-faced and irate, but who've been silenced and dar- en't speak another word. One hand point- ing at them, but then turning to his disci- ples in today's passage and saying,

8 "But you are not to be called 'Rab- bi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heav- en. 10 Nor are you to be called in- structors, for you have one Instruc- tor, the Messiah.

Jesus is using the Pharisees and teachers of the law as illustrations of exactly what

not to do. They loved being called ‘Rabbi’, it suited their egos just fine. ‘But you, my disciples,’ says Jesus, are not to be called “Rabbi,” for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.’

He goes on,

9 And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah.

‘Not Rabbi, teacher, father or Instructor. You’re brothers. And you only have one teacher. Me. And one father, your Father in heaven.’ With these words Jesus is stripping from the Pharisees and teachers of the law their titles and condemn-

ing the pride that they take in them. And teaching his disciples that none of them should view themselves as being over and above each other, or indeed over and above any of God's people. Not Rabbis, or teachers or fathers or Instructors. But brothers and sisters in the family of God. With one teacher, Jesus. And one Father over all, our Heavenly Father. And as we'll see in tomorrow's passage if they do ascribe to greatness, it's not a question of being above God's people, but actually stepping down to become truly great.

Do not call anyone Rabbi, teacher, father or Instructor. What then no leaders in the church? No – just servants who lead. Those who've stepped down to into full-time ministry, stepped down to lead by becoming servants of all. What then, no teaching in

the church? No – except of course teaching taken directly from the bible, which is a book about Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh. No ‘human teaching’ in the church, no teaching of what has been added to the bible, no teaching of worldly wisdom, just speaking as if speaking the very words of God by speaking the very words of God from Scripture (1 Pet 4:11).

Jesus is doing a couple of things here. Firstly, he’s taking the wind out of the sails of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. They were proud. They loved their status. They should have been singularly focussed on the glory of God but instead they were singularly focussed on the glory of them. Jesus is firstly saying to them, and to those so influenced by them, that church leadership isn’t about hierarchy and pow-

er-plays and position and influence. It's about being brothers and sisters in Christ, who are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28) and serving your family as one who counts yourself as least amongst them. Secondly Jesus is saying that teaching in the church isn't about oral law, or debates between experts in the law about trivial things like tithing mint and dill or the style of music we play in church; it's about preaching Christ. Moses' seat is now filled by him. The whole law and the prophets are now fulfilled in him. The whole world needs to hear the good news about him. The time of Rabbis and teachers of the law is now over. The time for preaching the strictures of the law is now over. Now that the Messiah has come it's time to preach Christ crucified and him alone (1 Cor 1:23).

Think & Pray

Cast your eyes back over today's passage again now once or twice for yourself. Think about its implications. A few of things might grab you. Firstly, we're not like the world – with corporate ladders and bosses and big bosses over them – we're a family. We're brothers and sisters because we share a common Father. Is this how you view your church? Is this your first reaction when you meet Christians from other denominations? When you hear news of Christians being killed overseas? Family. Brothers and sisters in Christ. What can you do to be a better sister? What can you do today to be a better brother in your family?

It may be that you're in a position of lead-

ership within in your church. If so, are you stepping down to serve your family in the ministry that you do? Are you teaching them about Jesus? Are you putting his words in their hearts and minds and then living amongst them as he would? Laying down your life in service of your family? Are preaching Jesus and then practicing what you preach?

Finally, our family has one teacher, Jesus Christ. You might close your time of reflection by asking yourself what Jesus has taught you lately. How have you changed under the teaching of Jesus lately? And how are you going to be changed by Jesus' words to you today?

Paul says in Ephesians 3,

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

Close today by kneeling before our Father, praying for your family, and how you might become a better brother or sister in Christ towards them.