

The path to clarity (Matthew 23:1-12)

Is it possible to know what is real? Whom to believe?

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I have a recurring dream. It takes place on a gray and dreary day. I am driving a car in the rain on a highway, not a gentle spring rain but a torrential downpour. The windshield wipers can't keep up, and I can't see in front of me. Cars and semis are driving on each side of me.

I get to a point where three lanes turn into two to cross an overpass. Without the ability to see the cars alongside me, in front of me, or behind me, I hold my breath, close my eyes, put the pedal to the metal, and pray I make it to the other side. When my eyes open, I am in a beautiful valley of flowers. The sun is shining bright, and flowers of every color and shade are everywhere. A peace falls upon me, and I wake up.

In Matthew 23, Jesus teaches the crowd about hypocrisy. He warns against preachers who do not practice what they preach. He firmly sends a message to walk the talk and to follow God, the ultimate word and teacher.

In these days of information overload, heightened political rhetoric, the increased use of artificial intelligence, and phone cameras that can alter images in an instant, it is no wonder that I dream I am driving down a highway overpowered by a rainstorm. I imagine myself turning on the radio and hearing that old 1970s tune by Stealers Wheel: "Clowns to the left of me. / Jokers to the right. / Here I am stuck in the middle with you."

Is it possible to know what is real? Whom to believe? Which way to vote? Weeding through the torrential downpour of opinions, information, and perspectives is overwhelming. It ignites anxiety and fuels uncertainty. Is it possible to drive through the storm in order to get to clarity?

“The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.” Jesus, in his subtle and powerful way, describes for us the path to this clarity. He shows us the exit ramp off the overwhelming highway. It is so subtle that the Pharisees he’s talking to do not let the message enter their hearts. It is so subtle that if I am not careful I will miss the exit and have to turn back and around to find it again.

“The greatest among you will be your servant.” The greatest among you is Jesus.