The Shiny Cup and the Giant Camel

Teacher guide • Matthew 23:13–36 • Ages 6–10

Read the story together before the eight-minute activity. The modern story is an illustration, not a retelling of the passage. The camel in the artwork is imagined, not a real animal in the lemonade.

Print the A4 or Letter LONG-EDGE PDF on matching paper in landscape, double-sided, flip on LONG edge, actual size (100%). Fold the sheet in half. Outside: [4 | 1]. Inside before its complete 180° rotation: [2 | 3]. Reading PDFs are for screens or individual pages, not duplex booklet printing. Make one test copy before a class set.

Future QR destination: https://www.juniordisciples.com/lessons/clean-inside-outside. This fixed lesson page is not yet live. This is a print-first release; the paper lesson is complete. No website publication was performed.

Prepare the cup, napkin and two labeled paper cards before the timed activity. Do not drink from the demonstration cup. Keep the final response private; do not ask children to confess personal sins to the group. Suggested timing: 2 minutes for step 1, 3 for step 2, 3 for step 3. Timing is a leader estimate, not a classroom test.

Story and discussion — complete text

At the neighborhood fair, Ben was in charge of the lemonade stand. His big sign said: **EVERYONE WELCOME! FREE LEMONADE!**

Ben wanted his stand to look impressive. He lined up his striped cups in perfectly straight rows, then counted ten mint leaves for the first pitcher.

Just then, Mia came up with her little brother. He’d been running and was hot and thirsty.

“Two cups, please,” Mia said.

“Only for kids with a blue ticket,” Ben said.

Mia pointed to the sign. “You said everyone.”

“I wrote it,” Ben said. “I didn’t promise it.” Then he whispered to his helper, “If anyone asks, tell them the ticket rule was always there.”

Mia’s brother tugged at her sleeve. “Let’s go.”

“Hang on,” said Mia. She picked up a cup for her brother, then stopped. There was a sticky ring of old juice inside. She tipped it toward Ben.

Ben grabbed a napkin. Still busy making the cups look good, he picked up another cup and wiped the outside without looking inside.

“Ben,” Mia said. “That’s not where the dirt is.”

Just then his helper fished a tiny gnat out of the pitcher. “Got it!”

Mia looked at the pitcher, then at the little boy walking away. “You two noticed that, but what about him?”

Ben wanted to tell her to mind her own business. He’d spent all morning painting “Everyone welcome!” Now Mia was asking him to mean it, and he wanted her to go away.

Then he looked at the cup in his hand. He'd wiped the wrong side.

"Wait!" he called. "You don't need a ticket. I made up that rule. I'm sorry."

Ben and his helper washed the cups. Ben filled the first clean one with lemonade and carried it over to Mia's brother. No one clapped or stopped to admire his stand. The little boy just took a long drink. Ben watched him lower the cup. He had kept that thirsty boy waiting while he fussed over how everything looked. Now, instead of waiting for someone to praise his sign, Ben asked, "Would you like some more?"

Connect it to Jesus: Ben's helper noticed the gnat, but Ben nearly missed a much bigger wrong: keeping a thirsty boy away and covering it with a lie. Jesus pictured a tiny gnat and a huge camel to warn religious leaders. They carefully gave part of their herbs to God but neglected justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Religious work could not replace obeying God.

Ben wanted Mia to leave when she corrected him. Jesus warned of something much worse: the leaders said they would not have helped kill God's prophets, yet they would reject and hurt the messengers He sent.

Jesus sees our sin too. We don't have to hide it. Jesus died and rose again to save sinners. We can turn from sin, tell Him the truth, and trust Him for forgiveness and help to change. Putting things right does not earn His forgiveness. With His help, we can stop making excuses and obey God, not just look good.

Ask: If someone showed you that you were doing the wrong thing, what would you want to say first?

Activity: Find the Camel! (8 minutes)

You need: A clear cup with a little washable chocolate syrup inside, a napkin, and two paper cards: a tiny **GNAT** and a big **CAMEL**.

1. **Wipe the cup.** Let a child wipe the outside. Ask, "Why didn't that fix it?" Read Matthew 23:25–26.

2. **Find what matters more.** Read the pairs below. Have kids hold up the gnat for the little thing and the camel for what the person is missing. The little thing isn't necessarily bad. It just can't take the place of what matters more.

- I put every game piece back neatly, but I change the rules so my brother can't win. **What would be fair?**

- I can say my memory verse without missing a word, but I laugh when a new kid reads slowly. **What would mercy look like?**

- I make a beautiful promise card, but I look for a reason not to keep my word. **What would faithfulness look like?**

3. **Listen and act.** Read Matthew 23:29–34. Ask, "Is it easier to say 'I would have listened to God back then' or to listen when He corrects me now?" Have each child privately finish: **"Jesus, when You show me _____, help me _____."** Younger children can draw one action instead.

Line to remember: Don't just shine the cup. Listen to Jesus and let Him change what's inside.

Leader responses

The dirty ring is inside; wiping the outside cannot remove it. Ben’s “camel” includes excluding the thirsty boy, lying about his rule, and resisting correction while presenting himself as kind. Let children name the harm rather than guessing one secret answer.

Game: keep fair rules for everyone. Reading: encourage the new child and give time or help. Promise: keep your word rather than invent an excuse. Neatness, accurate memory and beautiful cards are not bad; they must not replace justice, mercy and faithfulness.

Listen and act: children may answer in words or pictures. A suitable answer names a real change such as welcoming someone, telling the truth, or keeping a promise. Repairing harm does not buy forgiveness. Jesus saves sinners; changed action responds to His grace.

Ask what Ben’s camel was only after explaining the metaphor and reading Matthew 23:24. The helper finds the gnat. Mia keeps her cup while Ben wipes another. No one clapped: Ben stops waiting for his stand to be admired and notices the boy’s need. Praise itself is not wrong; appearance cannot replace obedience. Religious activity cannot excuse refusing God’s correction. Jesus saves; repair is a response, not payment.

Passage context

Jesus addresses scribes and Pharisees who obstruct entry to the kingdom (13), reproduce their error in converts (15), evade truthful commitments (16–22), neglect justice, mercy and faithfulness while tithing (23–24), and hide greed and lawlessness behind outward purity (25–28). Honoring dead prophets does not excuse rejecting God’s living messengers (29–34). Verses 35–36 announce grave accountability and judgment on that generation. Do not turn this warning into contempt for Jewish people or a label for every childish mistake. The death and resurrection sentence is broader gospel teaching (1 Corinthians 15:3–4), not a quotation from Matthew 23.

Edition note • Matthew 23:14

ESV does not print verse 14 in its main text; its note at 23:13 says some manuscripts add it here or after verse 12. RST 167 includes verse 14 in the main text. The quotation inventories below deliberately preserve that difference.

23:13 Some manuscripts add here (or after verse 12) verse 14: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive the greater condemnation

Read aloud: Matthew 23:25–26

25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

Read aloud: Matthew 23:29–34

29 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous,

30 saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’

31 Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.

33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

34 Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town,

Full passage • Matthew 23:13–36 • ESV

13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.

15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

16 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’

17 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?

18 And you say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.’

19 You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

20 So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.

21 And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it.

22 And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.

23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

24 You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.

28 So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

29 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous,

30 saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’

31 Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.

33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

34 Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town,

35 so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

36 Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

Sources / Источники

https://www.bible.com/bible/59/MAT.23.ESV

https://www.bible.com/bible/167/MAT.23.RST

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Activity answer key

Page 2: First clean the inside. Page 4 words for what matters more: JUSTICE, MERCY, FAITHFULNESS. The search uses all eight possible directions; each target has exactly one location.



JUSTICE / MERCY / FAITHFULNESS / INSIDE / OUTSIDE / FIRST / CUP / GNAT / CAMEL / TRUTH / LISTEN / CHANGE

Picture-puzzle key



Toothbrush above the bunting; mitten next to the pitcher; fish in the left leaves; teapot in the bottom-right foliage. These are the four picture targets—not the children or the ordinary lemonade props.

The picture returns to the earlier moment of the story; the imagined camel is Jesus' comparison, not a real animal at the fair. Ask children to connect the clues to Ben's choices, not to call ordinary neatness bad.