

# Our Sabbath Scripture Stories



FAMILIES RECLAIMING SUNDAY

Read aloud: Malachi 1:14b—2:2b, 8-10  
1 Thessalonians 2:7b-9, 13

Gospel: Matthew 23:1-12

"Whooo" ... the winds whistled through the Pauline house this morning. The gusts were taking off the last of the few leaves left on the big oak tree in the front yard.

"Look at that tree," Vincent commented. "Year after year it stands there ... sturdy, solid, just doing it's work of budding leaves and shedding them. I respect that tree! It's mighty!"

"Vincent, what got into you?" Mary Clare laughed. "I don't think I've ever heard a 12 year old being so philosophical before!"

"It's just a humble, unshowy tree, that's all!" Vincent blushed. "We should all be more like a mighty tree!"

"Funny you should say that, Vincent," Dad said with a look of surprise in his eyes. "You know, our Scripture reading for this morning tells us the very same thing!"

Everyone gathered in the living room to hear what Dad meant. As he had done for years, Dad took out his Bible and read the Gospel for this Sunday.

Dad finished the reading with the line, "*Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*'" (Matthew 23:12)

"You see, Vincent, that is exactly what you were talking about!" Dad said as he closed the Bible. "Jesus is telling us that we can't be showy or loud or boastful. We need to be respectful, and meek, and know that all our true gifts and rewards come directly from God."

"Daddy?" little 4-year-old Hillary asked, as she tugged on her father's arm. "There was a big word in the reading I don't get."



"Which word was that, Hillary?" Dad asked her patiently.

"The big one ... fill something ... fill ... luckery, fill ... lickery, ... fill ... "

Dad could hardly contain himself from snort laughing. "You mean phylactery!" he exclaimed.

Hillary was laughing too. "Yeah, that's the one!"

"Well, Hillary, a phylactery was used by some very devout Jews. It was an attachment with light-blue fringe that they put on their arms or foreheads. The phylactery held quotations from Scripture. Some of them were very wide. The use of a phylactery to some became a one-upmanship kind of thing—the bigger and wider your phylactery was, the more religious people assumed you were."

"Why did they have them in the first place?" Mary Clare asked.

"Well, some people took literally the passage from Exodus and Deuteronomy which says you must always keep the Word of God in front of you. Jesus was telling them that what is in your heart is more important than some conspicuous outward sign."

"Daddy, I have a question, too," Lucy asked. "Why can't I call you 'Father' or call Mrs. Christensen at school 'Teacher'? I heard that in the reading, and I don't get it."

"Excellent question, Lucy," Dad smiled. "The point Jesus is making is that only God is our true Master, Teacher, and heavenly Father. The Aramaic translation of 'Father' is 'Abba' which is a title of honor. Again, you can call me 'Dad' or 'Daddy,' or 'Father,' and Mrs. Christensen 'teacher.' But always be mindful of the words of Jesus. You have only one true Master or Teacher which is Jesus, and one heavenly Father, which is God Almighty."

"There it is again, Dad," Vincent said, "the word 'mighty.' Just like our 'mighty' oak tree stands there strong and humble, we have to be just like that, unless ... "

"Unless what?" Dad wondered.

"Unless we're that kind of tree that Jesus told us not to be like ... the showy, wide one with fringe!" Vincent laughed.

"Huh?" they all said in unison.

"Yeah," Vincent chuckled, "a FLACK TREE!"

And on that groaning note, the family "branched" out to em- "bark," or "leaf" for Mass!

*"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled;  
but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."*

*(Matthew 23:12)*