

# Small Group Discussion and Prayer Guide

## June 4, 2023

Read: Matthew 23:13-15

Summary:

This is a terrifying pronouncement of Jesus against the spiritual leaders of his day for their failure to enter the kingdom of heaven, and even worse, their hindering of others from entry into the kingdom of heaven. From Jesus' conflict with and commentary upon the Pharisees in the gospel of Matthew, we can see them do this in several key ways. First, despite their impressive expertise in the Jewish Scriptures, their teaching has no room for Jesus and the gospel. This leads to their second way of hindering people: their teaching is all about moralizing and legalism without gospel. This is largely what is meant by Matthew 23:4 where the Pharisees are said to lay heavy burdens upon people without the willingness to help lift them. The Pharisees teach a moral behavioralism with no attending compassion, patience, support, or help. Third, the Pharisees hinder people from following God because of their hypocrisy. They are zealous in a certain sense of being committed to rigid legalistic behaviors, but they do not love God and they will not submit to Christ. This shows their moral and religious pursuits to be largely about their own prestige, influence and power in the community of Israel. Their failure to love God and submit to His Son results in their failure to enter the kingdom. What's worse, they resent others who are ready and willing to do what they themselves are not. Thus, they refuse to enter the kingdom, and do everything they can to prohibit others from entering it.

Ask:

- Have you ever had someone seriously discourage you in your pursuit of faith? How did that happen?
- Do you find in yourself resentment of people who seem to be doing better spiritually than you? Why?
- In what ways have you hindered your gospel witness with others and turned them off of following Jesus?
- Have you ever judged someone and moralized about their behavior without a willingness to help and support them? Why do we do this?
- Is there anything right now hindering your ministry efforts with someone else? If so, what do you need to do about it?

Pray:

- Praise the Father for reconciling us to himself through the shed blood of Jesus and not through any of our merit or effort
- Confess that we at times hinder others from the gospel through our moralism, lack of compassion and support, and hypocrisy.
- Ask for the Holy Spirit's help to truly love God with our whole being and minister to others in truth and grace.