

Small Group Discussion and Prayer Guide

May 28, 2023

Read: Matthew 23:1-12

Summary:

Jesus warns the crowds and disciples against becoming like the scribes and Pharisees in how they present as devout followers of God without being truly oriented toward him in their hearts. They love the social benefits of being perceived as godly and righteous, but do not desire God regardless of their religious prestige and standing among His people. "They do all their deeds to be seen by others" (23:5) and they love the recognition of being devoted to God more than they love the God they claim to be devoted to.

(This warning finds parallel principles in the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 4 & 5. They "wanted in" during the excitement of the early church and went to the extent of lying to God in order to be seen and accepted by others as generous, committed disciples of Jesus.)

Jesus also exhorts the crowds and disciples to pursue humility - to be marked by the humble posture of a servant of others which finds its source in the inward reality of a heart that loves God and follows the example of Jesus as our servant who gave his life as a ransom for many. Our exaltation is not for right here and right now, but will come later in the eternal kingdom of God.

Ask:

- What are ways you see Pharisaical hypocrisy show itself in the church today?
- Just as the Pharisees would lay extra burdens on people's shoulders without actually helping them pursue God, are there any extra burdens you may be carrying that aren't in accordance with the truth of the gospel, yet you've convinced yourself you must fulfill them? ("I need to _____ in order to be right with God" instead of "Jesus has already done everything necessary for me to be right with God")
- In what ways do you desire to be seen or perceived by others in the church? Are you pursuing that image with dishonest or selfish motives?
- Our orientation to Christ is all about the posture of our hearts toward him. What keeps us from being able to see and recognize that our hearts may not in fact be oriented to Christ?
- -Pride?
- -Loving an appearance?
- -Wrong thinking about what makes us Christians?
- In what ways do you need to repent in order to orient or reorient your heart toward Jesus?
- What encouragements and assurances do we find in Scripture that we can preach to ourselves and use to edify one another in the midst of seasons of doubt, confusion, or struggles with faith?

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Pray:

- Thank the Lord for being in himself everything we need for salvation from sin and rescue from death.
- Ask God to help us recognize hypocrisy in our walks with Jesus.
- Confess that we often get caught up in too strong of a desire for a certain image among the people of God, and that we often pursue that image with poor motives.
- Ask God to help us repent of selfishness and turn to Christ in faith and humility.
- Ask God to help us follow the example of Jesus as a servant.
- Thank the Lord for his continual, faithful work of sanctification in the lives of his people.