KINGDOM of HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Community Group Material - *from Margie Muller*

Matthew 23:13-28

Week of Sunday 11th August 2024

Seven woes to Scribes and Pharisees (Part 1)

Leader Preparation

Read Matthew 23:13-28 and pages 4-8 of the "Kingdom of Heaven" notes volume 5
The list of woes goes up to verse 33 but our study will focus on the first six woes.

Note the similarity in structure to the Beatitudes recorded in Matthew 5:3-12

Consider the severity and harshness of this criticism of religious leaders.
What role has Jesus assumed? Prophet, Priest or King?
Jesus was teaching the crowds and his disciples, so this is a very public rebuke of the Pharisees.
Since the Pharisees could not be entrusted with teaching the Law, Jesus replaced them with the disciples.

Group Time:

What does the expression "Woe to you!"actually mean?

"Shame on you! Watch out! A curse on you!

Whichever way we look at it, it is a stern and harsh reprimand.

- Have you ever used a similar expression?
- Have you called someone a hypocrite, or have you been called a hypocrite?

Sometimes that term is used quite lightly, yet Jesus' warning is that the hypocrite is on the path to hell; he condemns his soul by his words and his actions not matching up.
We must be careful to note though, that a hypocrite is not someone who makes mistakes – that would be every one of us! A hypocrite is someone who says and believes that he doesn't make mistakes.

Exploring the Passage:

READ Matthew 23:13-28

The Woes

1st Woe – preventing people from entering the Kingdom of God

- How is this possible?
- What are the teachers of the law doing to hinder those that are seeking God? (See Mtt 23:4 where Jesus accuses the religious leaders of placing unnecessary burdens on the people)
- What examples do we have of the religious leaders erring in their teaching and misleading the people?

Contrast this with Mtt 21:31-32 in which Jesus sees the prostitutes and tax collectors getting into the Kingdom before the religious leaders.

- How did they get past the religious leaders who had "shut the kingdom of heaven in mens' faces"? (By following the path of righteousness - not **self**-righteousness).
- How might we sometimes be guilty of hindering those that are seeking God?

2nd Woe – converting or convincing people of their teachings.

The religious leaders measured their success by the number of followers they had and went to great length to win people over with clever arguments. Often these followers were more zealous and ambitious than their leaders (possibly because they wanted to become leaders) and did great damage by leading even more people astray.

- How do we reconcile this accusation with Jesus' command to respect the religious leaders (Mtt 23:1-3)?
- We need to value God's ordinances and recognize the servants that the master has sent (parable of the tenants of the vineyard Mtt 21:32-41).
- What pitfalls should leaders in the church be careful to avoid?

3rd Woe – Blind guides swearing false oaths

- What is the purpose of taking an oath?
- Do you remember any "rules" you had as children that released you from keeping your word?

Looking for loopholes, or even creating loopholes in the law may help you to escape responsibility and accountability to men but not to God.

- What does Jesus' teaching on oaths in the Sermon on the Mount (Mtt 5:35-37) say we should do?

4th Woe – Giving a tenth.

Read Hosea 6:6. What is important to God?

The principle of tithing is correct, but by overemphasizing this practice the religious leaders neglected the most important matters of law - justice, mercy and faithfulness.

What rules of God do we place significant emphasis on in our church?

What rules or values may we be neglecting?

5th and 6th Woes – Outward appearances

What is the source of our brokenness?

What actions were the Pharisees using to try to avoid or rid themselves of sin?

What did they need to do to be clean?

The Pharisees prided themselves on being law-keepers, but for Jesus, obedience to the law must emanate from the heart. See Mtt 15:17-20 where Jesus teaches on what makes a man "unclean".

Closing off

Thank God for the leaders and elders of our church and for their faithful teaching of God's word..
You might like to pray for the pastors and elders specifically:
https://ruc.org.za/about/leadership-team/
Pray that their love for God would keep them on the paths of righteousness.

May God's holy scriptures govern every part of our lives and keep our hearts filled with a desire to serve Him.