KINGDOM of HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Community Group Material – *from Zwai Zulu*

Matthew 23:27-24:1-2

Week of 18th August 2024

The Grieving Prophet

Leader Preparation

1. Pray for Insight and Wisdom:
   - Ask God for discernment in understanding the passage and for the ability to guide the group in meaningful discussion.

2. Study the Passage:
   - Read Matthew 23:27 - 24:2 multiple times in different translations to grasp the nuances of the text.
   - Research historical and cultural context, particularly regarding the temple's significance and the role of the religious leaders.

3. Reflect on Key Themes:
   - Contemplate the dangers of hypocrisy and the importance of inner spiritual integrity.
   - Consider the significance of Jesus' prophecy about the temple and its implications for the disciples and the early church.

4. Plan for Application:
   - Consider how the passage speaks to modern-day issues within the church and how your group can respond.

Group Time:

Start the evening with a practical "object lesson". Take a grocery product box (eg biscuits / breakfast cereal / tea) and put something unexpected in it (dog biscuits / dishwasher tablets / dirty cloths). Get people to pass the box around and look in it. Discuss what it's like when the outer appearance is different from the inner reality.

Share an experience where you were surprised by someone's true character (positive or negative) after getting to know them better.

Exploring the Passage

Have different group members read sections of Matthew 23:27 - 24:2 aloud, allowing everyone to hear the passage in different voices.

Content

1. Understanding Hypocrisy (Matthew 23:27-28):
   - What does it mean to be like "whitewashed tombs"? How can we guard against hypocrisy in our own lives?
   - How does our society value appearances, and how can this influence our spiritual lives?

2. The Danger of Ignoring Past Lessons (Matthew 23:29-36):
   - Why does Jesus link the religious leaders with the sins of their ancestors?
   - What warnings can we take from this?
   - Which prophets have they recently rejected?
   - What does Jesus mean when he says them “Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers” (Matt 23:32)

These guys built nice tombs, erected nice monuments at the burial sites of these great prophets. They were outwardly trying to show their respect for them. They would publicly distance themselves from the actions of their forefathers who never listened to the prophets but killed them, claiming that they love the prophets and would have listened to them. And yet Jesus argues that they are no different to their forefathers! If anything, they are worse than them because they will ultimately crucify God’s ULTIMATE prophet, Jesus. They will finish off what their forefathers started. And because of this judgement is coming.

   - Patterns of sin can be passed down from one generation to another. Are there sins that you have had to address in your family?
   - Discuss the importance of repentance and breaking free from these sins.

3. Jesus’ Lament and Prophecy (Matthew 23:37-39):
   - What does Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem reveal about His heart for the people? How does this challenge our approach to those who reject Christ?
   - Discuss the tension between God's justice and His desire for people to turn to Him. How should this inform our evangelism and prayer life?

4. The Prophecy of the Temple’s Destruction (Matthew 24:1-2):
   - What was the significance of the temple to the disciples, and why is its destruction so important in this context?
   - Do we have things that we hold onto on earth that are transient. Do we value them more than we value God’s eternal kingdom? What should we prioritise?

Hypocrisy in Prayer

Prayer is a place in our Christian lives where we may be prone to hypocrisy. Sometimes we may present ourselves in group prayer as deeply spiritual and erudite, when our faith is feeble and struggling.

Some questions that can help us see whether our outer appearance matches the inward reality:

- *Do I pray more frequently in public than I do in private?*
- *Do I use the same language when I pray with others or by myself? Are we sincere, or trying to sound overly spiritual?*
- *Why is it that I will not pray in public? Being self-focused can be seen by our lack of sharing in community as much as by showing off.*

O gracious Lord Christ,

You see how often I am guilty of the same hypocrisy as the Pharisees.

Deliver me from the insincerity which at times mingles with even my holiest desires.

Make me more aware of my own sins and shortcomings than of those of others.

And grant that, walking in love, I abide also in the truth,

to the praise of your guiding Spirit.

Adapted from a prayer by William Penney
