

Home Group notes for the week following 5 November 2017

DISCIPLESHIP: Humble Service

AS WE GATHER

At the time of Jesus there were some 6000 Pharisees. The name is taken from the word meaning set aside / to separate. The Pharisees were separated from the Gentiles, from 'unclean' Jews who did not practice the Law (tax collectors and sinners – Luke 15:1-2), and those who were opposed to their scrupulous and traditional observance of the numerous rules and regulations that governed their lives. In Chapter 23 Matthew records Jesus' last public address and it is a scathing denunciation of false religion / hypocritical righteousness parading under the guise of truth.

READING SCRIPTURE Joshua 3:7-17 Psalm 107:1-7 + 33-37 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13
Matthew 23:1-12

THINKING TOGETHER

Among the Pharisees were a few who looked for / followed true spiritual religion – for example Nicodemus (John 3 + 7:50-53), Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38-) and the unnamed man mentioned in Mark 12:32-34. But for the most part the Pharisees used their religion to promote themselves and for material benefit. No wonder Jesus denounced them, beginning with an explanation to the crowd of the basic flaws of the pharisaical religion.

- They had a false concept of righteousness and assumed an authority not their own (Matthew 23:2). Their only authority was the Word of God, therefore people were to obey whatever they taught from the Word, but not their traditions / man-made rules which governed every aspect of life (Matthew 23:3). To preach / profess one thing and practice another is hypocrisy (Matthew 23:13 + 23-24 1 Thessalonians 3:7-9).
God desires truth in the 'inner' parts (Psalm 51:6)
How can Christians (spiritual leaders and members of the faith community) prevent becoming contaminated by the world in which they live today? Discuss
(Joshua 3:7-17)

Do you take time at the beginning of each day to focus on what God wants from your activities before you rush into the day? Discuss

- They had a false concept of ministry, being harder on others than on themselves (Matthew 23:4). They became hypocritical religious dictators, not spiritual leaders. Jesus came to lighten people's burdens (Matthew 11:28-30), but legalistic religion makes the burden heavier.
How can we tell the difference between 'true' religion (grace) and legalistic religion? Discuss (1Thessalonians 2:9-13)

There are many people in need of Christian ministry – the spiritually lost and exhausted; those imprisoned by guilt, fear, evil; the physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually sick, and those troubled by problems, worry, and negative circumstances.

Often God will only provide solutions / help when we trust Him enough to follow His guidance.

What are the problems / situations you are facing at the moment? Discuss

However, God always keeps His promises (Psalm 107:33-37)

Do you believe this? Discuss

What has God done for you? Discuss (see for eg John 14:5-6 John 6:33-35 John 4:10-14)

Discuss the statement 'Hardships/ distress help us to develop the spiritual insight to see God's love and kindness'

Jesus never asks us to do anything He has not done first

How does this make you feel about your ministry? Discuss

- They had a false concept of greatness (Matthew 23:5-13). Success to the Pharisees meant recognition by and the praise / approval of others. They had lost their need for the approval of God and did not use their religion to glorify God (Matthew 5:16). Instead they used = significant religious objects / ornamentation as a display of piety (Matthew 23:5)

What was God's intended purpose for the use of phylacteries and tassels? Discuss (Deuteronomy 6:4-6 + 11:18 Numbers 15:37-41)

What symbols / objects do Christians use to help them remember God's love and all that He has done for them? Discuss

= position to mark greatness (Matthew 23:6). Seating arrangements at banquets and in places of worship have no bearing on what a person is. Success does not denote value.

What was Joshua's response to God's words to him? Discuss (Joshua 3:7 + 9-10a)

It is dangerous when love of position held / status in the Church is stronger than loyalty to God

Why is this? Discuss

= titles to denote honour (Matthew 23:7-10). All believers are brothers and sisters in Christ, and Jesus alone is Teacher, Lord and Master; and although spiritual leaders may often be thought of as the spiritual fathers of those whom they have brought to salvation through the Gospel, they are not addressed as such (1Corinthians 4:15), they do not replace God the Father in our lives.

God places (calls) spiritual leaders in the Church, and to Jesus greatness comes from serving – giving of self to help God and others.

What kind of greatness are you looking for? Discuss

Spiritual leadership directs people into freedom and a close(r) relationship with Christ, not into the bondage of their (the leaders) personal ideas and beliefs. True greatness can only come from God as we obey and serve Him (John 3:30 + 13 and 12:17 1 Peter 5:6 Matthew 23:11-12)

IN CLOSING

God's commandments (laws) are based on two principles – reverence for God and all that is His, and respect for others and all that is theirs. These principles are eternal, and are found in our relationship with Jesus, our Teacher, Lord, Master, Guide, Brother, Friend; and in serving Him and others.

PRAYER

Righteous and Holy God, your Spirit speaks through your prophets; raise up new voices in our time to speak with justice and power, and, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to challenge our arrogance that seeks status above service. Amen

