



Connect Group reflection and questions

Matthew 22:15-23:12 - Warning against Hypocrisy

At the heart of our passage today lies the question, 'who is really number one in our lives'. Throughout the previous weeks we have seen that Jesus' legitimate authority is asserted, demonstrated, accepted by some and rejected by others. The 'others' in this case are the religious and political leaders who loudly proclaim their godliness while really seeking their own importance, their own ends.

In the middle of our passage today sits the two great commandments. These words are challenging and important words for the believer but ultimately words of judgement upon the person whose primary commitment is to themselves. In the end their true love will be exposed, and God will give them what they have chosen, eternity with self. Working out the priority of loving God and others is not always easy and today I would like our groups to explore the complexity and tension of this calling and to pray that we would not be mask bearers but people who truly love God and love others.

Questions for connect groups.

1. How do we commit ourselves to God and others while still looking after ourselves. Is that responsibility a good thing or a bad thing?

2. In Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 we are told to be good citizens. At what points does the priority of serving Jesus take precedence? Can you think of periods of church history when the church's submission to authority became a serious betrayal?

3. A question we cannot really answer until we have to face it, but we should explore is this: How would we cope if our lives or freedom were under threat because of our faith? How would we as a church cope? Are you aware that there has been more persecution, more killing of Christians in recent years than in any other time in history?

4. On YouTube you can find 'Widow's joy': he (her husband) didn't deny Christ when beheaded.' You may not be able to view this together, but you can imagine a testimony of a 23 year old widow expressing joy that her husband remained faithful to Jesus while waiting for his throat to be cut.

How do we feel about a person like that? Her response is wonderful but might be hard for us to do if we were in the same situation. As we approach Easter, we need to ponder our comfortable lives and once again ask: Do we love God first and our neighbour second or are we still being driven by our own needs. Pray together seeking forgiveness for our failings in this matter and asking that together we might be true to Jesus even if persecution comes to our country.

5. Without sinking into judgement we need to explore together ways in which the church can succumb to 'show' and pretence and lose its first love. What are the risks for our church and for us?

6. Pray for those followers of Jesus around the world whose lives are constantly at risk and pray that God would give us the strength to serve him faithfully until our lives end however rough and dangerous the journey might become.

Hugh