Matthew: Woe To You

Discussion Guide for November 1 and 2, 2026

Summary

Jesus confronts the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:13-22 for hypocrisy, acting one way outwardly while their hearts were something else. He gives three examples: gatekeeping faith with man-made rules, failing to disciple new converts, and being loose with their words. In contrast, God is perfectly trustworthy, and all His promises find their Yes in Jesus.

Ice Breaker

Think of a time you were disappointed when something or someone was not what it claimed to be (a product, a business, or a person). What made it frustrating, and how did it affect your trust?

Key Verses

1. Matthew 23:13-22
2. Acts 15:10
3. Colossians 2:6-7
4. James 5:12
5. 2 Corinthians 1:20

Discussion Questions

1. Jesus said the religious leaders shut the door of the kingdom in people's faces by gatekeeping faith with man-made standards. What man-made standards have you seen Christians use to judge someone's faith, and how can we tell the difference between a biblical conviction and a man-made rule?

2. The religious leaders worked hard to win converts but did little to disciple them. Why is it easy to stop at conversion, and what is one step you could take to pursue a deeper faith, or help someone else pursue one?

3. Jesus condemned the leaders' loophole-filled system of oaths and called us to let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no." Where are you most tempted to be less than fully truthful (small talk, hard conversations, giving counsel), and how does God's faithfulness encourage you to be a person of your word?

Life Application

This week, ask God: Where am I acting one way on the outside but being something else on the inside? Then take two steps. First, ask yourself, "Are there non-biblical standards I use to gatekeep faith, and is my speech fully truthful?" Pick one area to change, such as extending grace to someone you have judged or giving an honest answer when asked how you are doing. Second, pursue a deeper faith by joining a community group, EMAW, or a Bible study, or by asking someone to disciple you (write "discipleship" on your connect card/app if you are not sure where to begin). Come ready next time to share what you did and how it affected you.

Key Takeaways

1. Hypocrisy reveals the heart. Acting one way publicly while being something else privately points to what is truly inside us.
2. Avoid gatekeeping faith with man-made standards, pursue deeper faith beyond conversion, and be fully truthful so that your "yes" means "yes."
3. God is perfectly trustworthy. He says what He means and means what He says, and all His promises find their Yes in Jesus.