

MATTHEW: SMALL GROUP LEADERS GUIDE

Within the 400 years that existed historically between Malachi (*the close of the Old Testament*) and Matthew (*the beginning of the New Testament*) a lot occurred. The sad truth is these events didn't include any new revelation from God. Following their exile, instead of returning to their saving relationship with God, the people turned to dead, religious ritual. In the book of Matthew, God breaks His silence and reveals Himself to His people in the person of Jesus. The people were looking to a broken religion to earn God's favor. Matthew challenge is that salvation was always promised to come through the people's relationship with God Himself - Christ Jesus.

THINKING POINTS FROM STUDY

1 Matthew present Jesus as the King of the Jews. The coming of Jesus had been predicted and promised throughout the entire Old Testament. Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection had been foretold; and yet, instead of embracing their King, so many despised and rejected Him.

QUESTIONS: *In what way is Jesus your King? If you look to Jesus as your King, what would that make you? What implications should the king / servant relationship have in your life? If you were being honest, in what way should this relational perspective change the way you behave? Are you properly serving your King?*

2 Aside from presenting Jesus as the long awaited King of the Jews, one of the main themes of Matthew's Gospel is the "Kingdom" Jesus had come to establish. In three occasions Matthew records sermons in which Jesus expounds upon the nature and purpose of the "Kingdom of Heaven" (*Matthew 5-7, Matthew 13, Matthew 24-25*). This concept was the core of Jesus earthly ministry.

QUESTIONS: *When Jesus references a kingdom, what is He talking about? What are the characteristics of the kingdom of heaven Jesus came to establish? How does Jesus' kingdom stand in contrast to what we typically find in this fallen world? If we serve a real King who reigns over a real kingdom that we're apart of, how should this impact the way we live and interact with the world around us?*

3 In the 400 years of silence, God's people had sadly fallen into the trappings of religious experience over a saving relationship with God. Though the Jews had put off many of their typical errors in thinking, they were still as lost as ever. The religious man needs Christ for salvation, not religion.

QUESTIONS: *What kind of religious trappings had the Jews fallen into too? What are some of the religious rituals we can become distracted by? How do "religious traditions" rob us from a saving relationship with God? What is the ultimate trap of religion?*

DEVOTIONS

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