

What Lies Ahead

Part 2: The Problem with Religion

Matthew 16:16-18

ME: Secret: Hate religious stuff... "Oh we have a pastor... pray for dinner." Maybe growing up in a pastor's family... others always expecting things or assuming things.

I'm sure I sometimes take it too far... too cynical...

WE: But for a lot of people, maybe you, Religion is just "blech". Easy Ignore. Or avoid. Even Reject

Don't blame you... used, misused, abused... become a weapon of judgment and throughout history to control and conquer. [PICS of crusades, spanish inquisition, Westboro, KKK, etc.]

Why you have rejected?... Don't blame you.

So why do I help lead a church... a registered religious organization?... The Money and Power. J/K

B/c **what we usually view as "religion" has nothing to do with Jesus.**

So why does modern American Christianity seem to be so "religious"?

We've allowed what Andy Stanley calls the Temple Model to seep back in.

(Episode heavily influenced by... Stanley/Mancini/Hartman... links in show notes You probably won't agree with everything they think and say, but they do have an interesting perspective on the American Church)

Temple Model- All religions... Aztecs, Greeks, Jews, Africans, even Rajneesh. [PICS]

Temple model consists of sacred men, sacred places, sacred texts, sincere/superstitious followers.

It works like this: Power is given to **sacred men** in **sacred places** who determine the meaning of **sacred texts** and get to say who is the true **sincere follower** and who isn't.

BUT... **Jesus came to create something entirely new.** Do away with all of that.

Unfortunately we've allowed the old Temple/Religious thinking and practice to seep back in...

Here I'll prove it... take you on a journey... A journey through time... [Some kind of time travel effect here]

GOD:

Matthew tells us that one day Jesus stood with his disciples and looked at... Caesarea Philippi- **PICTURE**
150 mi N of Jerusalem Named after Caesar Augustus when he died in AD 14- First Emperor **Augustus Pic**
Everyone knew who he was Adopted son of Julius (declared divine) Son of a god

Jesus asks, "Who do you think I am?" Peter... **Matthew 16:16-18**

Main point isn't "what's the rock?"... Main point is Jesus' claim.... "I will build my church."

Church: German: "House of the Lord" **Ekklesia:** Not religious term- Greek: gathering, assembly, congregation

Jesus didn't say he would build a place. Said He would build a people.

With one thing in common... HIM. Jesus is the Christ/Messiah, the Son of God. God the Son in a body.

Church is not a place we go or something we do. It's what we are.

Jesus taught that places aren't sacred... PERSON next to you is more sacred than any piece of land or building in world. (How different would world be if we all viewed it this way?)

Taught that no one is more sacred than anyone else- Yes leaders/teachers/shepherds BUT... direct access to OUR (collective/shared) FATHER. 1 Peter 2:9 "Holy priesthood". Equal, Direct access, authority and power to bring others to God.

Sacred text- All commands summed up with one- John 15:12 "LOVE each other as I have loved you."

Must have seemed crazy, but exciting... 12 looking at each other... A community based on Jesus being the chosen one that would be more powerful than Rome, Jerusalem, even death.

But then Jesus kept healing, kept defying the religious leaders, rode into Jerusalem as Messiah... Let's Go!!

And then, Jesus died and they all lost faith. Obviously he wasn't the messiah/ the Son of God
Obviously there would be no Jesus gathering or assembly... had based it all on himself.

But the resurrection changed everything.

A few weeks later Jesus gathered his followers together and said what we looked at in Episode 1...

Matthew 28:18-20

All authority! That's a lot of authority. Incredibly arrogant... unless it's true.

The resurrection proved that he did indeed have all authority.

"Jesus, what are you going to do with all of that authority/power?" "GO. Invite others into the Ekklesia"

Early Church- Great start. First few 100 years got it... On mission.

No Bible just a few letters and oral tradition, Just incredible Faith fueled by LOVE for God that expressed itself as love for others.

Loved each other... Forgave each other, carried each others burdens. Loved those who weren't Christians... even enemies!

Took care of orphans, widows, poor. Didn't make sense

Didn't fear death [Pic of lions in colosseum]. When you don't fear death you don't fear much.

No what ifs- free to be generous, love enemies, etc.

Gained popularity/approval throughout ancient world/cultures

Shattered tradition rules/roles of men over women, over children, over slaves... all equal in Jesus. How?

When the Church focuses on Jesus' mission... love wins and lives are transformed.

But then something happened that changed the course of the story

Constantine 312... "In this sign conquer..." Became Christian... made Empire Christian "Holy Roman Empire"
"Very Roman, Very Empire... not very holy."

Slowly Temple/Religion Model crept in... Dumped wealth on church and bishops... created a class of sacred men.
Built churches all over empire- sacred places.

Sacred text used and abused... available only in latin and chained to altar so only sacred men could interpret it.

Made everyone in Empire "Christian" whether they actually followed or understood at all. Made being a Christian part of a socio-political identity. If you are Roman or part of this tribe/group/empire/nation you are Christian.

Made heresy crime. Claiming the RIGHT beliefs became more important than faith expressing itself through love.
Creed after creed about what to believe but said nothing about love.

Mentality that made Crusades possible... Go kill these people who believe wrongly in name of God and be forgiven of all sins. The polar opposite of Jesus' love and example.

THEN... Martin Luther and others finally had had enough... Protestant Reformation 1517.
Made scripture, not church or pope, ultimate authority. Bible in common language.

Luther- "Simple layman ARMED with Scripture is greater than the mightiest pope without it."
'without' meaning... it made bible a weapon... Protestants did with the bible what the church had done with papal authority...

Used bible to control people... "It says here and it says here..."

Argued over what certain verses meant and split over it... **Ultimately love lost.**

See... **Religion prioritizes "right" belief and performance. Jesus prioritizes people and love.**

And still today we've made Temple Model part of what it means to be Christian... especially American Christian.

FUTURE CHURCH: 4 things American Christians prioritize in a church... Place/Personality/Programs/People What we are individually prioritizing...

PLACE- Sacred places... "Sanctuary" "The Lord's House" "Where I feel close to God"

PERSONALITY- Go to the sacred man I like best. Agree with, enjoy the teaching, etc.

PROGRAMS- Religious experience the sacred men create for me... where I'm taught sacred texts

PEOPLE- Go where friends/people like me who like me are... where my tribe is.

Change any of those and we tend to have issues... take them all away and you get this past year...

We've been committed to our religious preferences instead of Jesus' mission to GO.

YOU: What do we do... first look inside... A little temple model in all of us.

We feel a natural pull toward religious thinking instead of simple Jesus following.

Why? B/c it's easier to just follow rules. Also able to find more loopholes.

Able to measure "spirituality" in tangible ways. (Go to church, serve, give \$)

Soothes our pride- I'm better than so and so

Much less demanding than truly loving others... especially those you don't know or don't like/agree with.

Temple questions. Ready? These are likely to challenge you...

Do you ever wonder how close you can get to a particular sin without actually sinning?...

Do you ever feel more passionate about churches being closed/opened than loving someone who thinks differently than you?

Do you ever think to yourself... oh the universe is going to get them back for that and I can't wait...

More concerned about making America a Christian nation instead of loving other Americans? Or foreigners?

Do you believe there is a ritual that makes you right w/ God and removes your responsibility to make restitution to the person you've harmed?

Ever thought... Oh I'm a good person overall. The good I do outweighs the bad things.

Do other people's sins or failings bring out feelings of moral superiority rather than compassion?

If church goes... did pick/stay at / or quit b/c of Place/Personality/Program/or People? Or b/c this group of people are committed to mission of Jesus and his love?

Here's the thing... **We can't earn God's love through performance or saying we believe the "right" things.** Free Gift.

Can't do anything to take away or balance out the wrong.

He already loves you... and thoroughly and completely LIKES you.

Jesus died to take punishment... destroy the scales.

Came back to bring new life, identity, relationship, freedom to love others through his love... choose to trust his forgiveness.

Not a life of burden, judgment, ritual, performance... of making sure we believe right.

Read Matthew 11:28-30. Add to your Acts 1-12 reading?

"Easy" does not mean a life free of pain and hardship... word translated as KIND... not even a yoke...

Dane Ortlund- "like telling drowning man put on the burden of a life preserver."

His way is the kind, gentle way... not harsh expectations and heavy requirements.

Never a point accepted... maybe never heard it this way... now's your chance.

WE:

Following Jesus... being the Ekklesia... is not a hobby, a religious power up for your week, a philosophy for life, or set of rules and beliefs to follow or what it means to be American....

It's not about satisfying preferences... It's about inviting people to life.

Being free to invite neighbors to discover, enjoy and share the life Jesus offers... together.

CCC not trying to do anything new... we are trying to get back to what we were created to be in the first place...

It's not complicated...

Thought I'd quiz Danny 8-

What does Jesus want us to do? Tell everyone about him. What are his rules... love everybody.

See Following Jesus is not just another religion from which to choose.

It doesn't require Sunday school, A priest, Nor is it dependent on going to a weekly church service.

The life Jesus offers is the simple freedom to love to live in his love and share it with others... **not a complicated burden to bear.**

There's something better than the religion we see around us... It is what we've always been invited to be...

Invite you to discover, enjoy, and share the life Jesus offers... Together.

Questions

1. How have you seen God working in the lives of yourself & others this week?
2. What stood out to you most in this week's message? Were there any portions that were confusing or bothersome?
Discuss reactions and highlights together.
3. Read Matthew 11:28-30. What does this mean for you individually and us as a group of Jesus followers?
4. In the context of being simply free to love this week, how can your group pray for you?