

The Story of Jesus

Part 5: Does God want me to be religious?

Mark 2:18-3:6 - [watch online](#)

Summary:

God wants us to be religious, right? Wrong. The Story of Jesus isn't about following a list of religious rules. The Story of Jesus is the story of true love and freedom.

Main points:

[00:45] God doesn't want us to follow a religion. He wants us to know his love.

[01:42] Religion is trying to give God what we think he wants from us so he will give us what we think we want from him.

[04:32] Jesus was constantly accused of not being religious enough.

[05:08] The new life Jesus offers is marked by joy and celebration.

[07:02] Old religion can't contain the new life Jesus gives.

[10:13] Jesus doesn't care about our made up lists of rules, he cares about the needs of real people.

[12:44] Religion prioritizes rules over people. Jesus prioritizes people over everything else.

[13:38] If our attempts to make God happy keep us from loving people, God isn't going to be happy.

[17:38] When you know Jesus' love, what you want to do is love like Jesus.

[19:40] The Story of Jesus is the story of true love and freedom.

Invitation:

Read: Matt 11:28-30 and Gal 5:6b

Pray: Jesus, thank you for accepting and loving me. Teach me to follow you and you only.

Ask, "What does Jesus' love look like right now?"

Discussion questions:

1. What comes to mind when you think of "religion?" How does that compare to your understanding of what God wants for us?
2. Jon said, "Old religion can't contain the new life Jesus gives." How can we differentiate between following Jesus and adhering to religious rules? What are some practical examples of how following Jesus might look different from religious adherence in your life?
3. Read Matthew 11:28-30 and Galatians 5:6b. What stands out to you? How can these passages influence how we think about what God wants for us?
4. The story of Jesus is the story of true love and freedom. How can this perspective influence your relationship with God and others? How could it influence the way you talk about Jesus with others?
5. How can your group pray with you this week?

Transcript:

IN: If there is a God... what do you think he wants from you?

Be nice and do the best you can? Don't do naughty sins? Love your country? Go to church and read the Bible a lot?

It's actually so much better than that...the question shouldn't be what does God want from you, it should be what does God want FOR you... So let's talk about it together.

WE: God and religion seem to go hand in hand right? If you believe in God and want him to be really happy with you then you're gonna have to be religious.

But the truth is... **God doesn't want us to follow a religion. He wants us to know his love.**

Jesus said he was God himself who came to bring his kingdom to earth to give us a full/abundant life of joy, peace, confidence, purpose... but

When you think of religion what comes to mind... Rules? Hypocrisy? Greed? Narcissistic leaders? Guilt? Boredom?

That doesn't sound like a full/abundant life to me.

Where's the disconnect? Why do so many of us have this idea that to have the life Jesus offers we have to be religious?

Part of it has to do with our desire to have control... We want the life Jesus offers on our own terms...

- We want what we think we want... and want to make sure we get it... so we need some leverage on God

We try to earn the life Jesus offers... making sure God knows we deserve it so he is obligated to give us the life we want...

Religion is trying to give God what we think he wants from us so he will give us what we think we want from him

Result? All the things we dislike about religion...

Guilt/Fear- Can't measure up so afraid of punishment in some form

Hypocrisy- Pretending to be better than we are

Pride/Judgmentalism- Oh look how good I am... God's taken care of me so I guess I'm getting it right. And obviously they aren't doing it right

Legalism- Trying to follow every rule/and make others do to make sure God is happy

We need something different and entirely new... It was different and new 2000 years ago and it's shockingly different and new today... we find it in the Story of Jesus.

GOD: At this point in the story... Jesus has been teaching/healing and people are flocking to him... most famous/popular person in the area.

The religious establishment is starting to worry... he claimed the right to forgive sin... giving himself the same authority as God.

So there are a lot of questions about who he is, what his agenda is, what he's actually trying to do...

In this very religious culture Jesus wasn't the only option in town... and some people have noticed a difference...

2:18 Jewish religious law only prescribed one annual fast for the people of Israel on what was called the day of Atonement...

- Over the years the community had added a few more regular times to fast...
- To mark national mourning and repentance remembering times they turned away from God

And often individuals would choose to fast for personal mourning/repentance..

But the other religious groups in the area, including JB, said, "If God told us to do it once a year then twice a week would really impress him..."

- Something God had never said.

But Jesus was different... he and his disciples didn't need to impress God w/ how religious they were... in fact they didn't fast at all.

So people come with an honest question... If these groups are so devoted and take their religion so seriously that they fast regularly... what's your deal... why aren't you as religious/pious?

Ever have someone question if you are religious/holy enough? Fun isn't it?

Even if you're secure in who you are it still causes a little sting that makes you question if you are good enough.

- In good company... **Jesus was constantly accused of not being religious enough.**

B/c Jesus came to bring something different...

2:19-20 Isn't that fun? Jesus described following him as attending a wedding feast.

Weddings represent new beginnings... theres joy and excitement of a new relationship/family being created...

- Exactly what Jesus was bringing...

The new life Jesus offers is marked by joy and celebration.

The other religious groups were so serious and so focused on mourning and remorse that fasting seemed normal...

But Jesus wasn't bringing something focused on the past and their failures... He was bringing something that looked forward with hope to what God was about to do... Bring his kingdom into the hearts and lives of his new people

And the source of that Joy in this picture is the groom... Jesus

Who would go to a wedding reception, sit next to the groom, and refuse to eat and celebrate?

Jesus says someday he will be taken away and his disciples will mourn/fast then... the wording is a violent taking away.

- Alluding to his death... and that will be a day for mourning.

But right now Jesus was bringing something new and the old ways of religion wouldn't work within it.

Gives two more examples to try to explain...

2:21-22 If you try to put a new, unshrunk patch on old clothes it's going to pull away and tear more...

- Jesus wasn't just trying to fix up the old religion...

If you put new still fermenting wine in old wineskins that have already been stretched to their limits they are going to burst and ruin both the wine and skins.

- The 'new' Jesus was bringing was powerful and explosive... couldn't fit within the old way of thinking about God...

Old religion can't contain the new life Jesus gives.

Following Jesus requires new thinking... new seeing... new living... New clothes and new wineskins.

We say that's nice. I like that... But then we turn around and try to combine old religion with the Jesus way...

Still try to reach God on our terms... try to impress him with our "doing our bests"

- and then look down on those who aren't trying as hard as we think they should.

And that's the worst part... not only do we keep ourselves in this sad transactional relationship with God... we try to force others into it too...

v. 23-26 On Sabbath (7th day-saturday) the Jews rested and didn't work.

Sabbath was one of the main distinguishing marks that you belonged to the Jewish nation.

- To keep it meant you were part of God's special, chosen, set apart, faithful people.

Not only was it one of the 10 Commandments... at its core it was a sign that they belonged to the Creator God who stopped working and rested on the 7th day of creation.

But work is a very vague word and we aren't comfortable with vagueness especially when it comes to religion...

- We prefer lists so we can know if we are doing it right... and when we are given a list of rules we naturally look for loopholes too

They didn't want to leave anything to chance and accidentally break God's law for them so over the years through a lot of debate...

Came up with 39 prohibited actions and in those 39 explained how they fit in certain situations and eventualities.

So when Jesus' disciples pick some grain, they are technically reaping a harvest (work)... and some Pharisees see this...

Pharisees- Very pious men who had devoted their lives to studying and teaching the Jewish scriptures.

They were a self-chosen group with no official authority to make laws or enforce them...

But, they had a lot of influence b/c the people respected their expertise in Israel's laws and traditions.

And these men took it upon themselves to root out anything that smelled like polluted religion... and Jesus starting to smell a little funny to them... they needed to make sure he wasn't dangerous.

Turned out he was.

B/c Jesus had more important things to do than join their religious debates about what was and wasn't work... **Jesus doesn't care about our made up lists of rules, he cares about the needs of real people.**

So he recalls the story of their greatest king David needing food, going to the priest and taking the bread for him and his hungry men that was only allowed for the priests.

- Technically breaking God's rules.

Jesus says... since David had the authority to decide what was and wasn't breaking the rules... so do I... and if you knew who I really was you'd agree...

V. 27-28 The Sabbath wasn't intended to be something to keep God happy... the sabbath was created to make sure people had a day of rest.

- Couldn't be forced either by their employers, worries, or greed to work everyday of the week.

It reminded them God took care of their needs and that they could simply rest in his provision and care.

But it had been religiousified, weaponized and turned it into a burden with extra rules and regulations.

It had become an attempt to manipulate God by making him see how pious and holy they were.

The rule became more important than the people the rule was created for...

And Jesus says your debates have been cute but that's over... I have the authority to say what is and isn't breaking the rules...

Who in their right mind would actually say that? Right? But then he proves it...

3:1-2 See what happens when we care more about making sure the rules are followed than that people are loved?

- Become like these slimy nerdy jackwagons.
- Cared more about making sure their rules were upheld then if people were healed.

Notice... Jesus' love for people was so well known even his enemies tried to use it against him

V. 3-4 Their rules said someone could work on Sabbath if it meant it would save someone's life... but this man's hand wasn't life-threatening so it could wait until the next day...

But again, Jesus doesn't care about their made up rules... **Religion prioritizes rules over people. Jesus prioritizes people over everything else.**

And Jesus isn't going to let anyone forget it... It's time to love some people and make some enemies. By publicly forcing the issue...

- It's interesting what happens when you really love like Jesus... people get uncomfortable.

"Sabbath is a time God set aside for his people, to do good for them... why wouldn't he want someone healed on the Sabbath?"

And they won't answer... instead they pout.

V. 5 (Anger and sadness) Why are you so stubborn? Why do you refuse to see who God really is?

If our attempts to make God happy keep us from loving people, God isn't going to be happy.

V. 6 Jesus heals the man without a touch or any other kind of act... simply his words.

Pharisees reaction? "Oh wow! He must be right... look what he can do... we need to rethink everything we thought we knew about God... maybe we were mistaken and don't know as much as we think we do"

NOPE... "This guy disagrees with us...so obviously he's bad. We gotta destroy him."

When we are fully convinced we are the only ones who know what God wants... even God can't convince us otherwise.

Pharisees usually saw the supporters of King Herod and traitors to their religion... but since they have no power themselves they have to make an unnatural alliance... in order to silence Jesus.

They were fully convinced Jesus was leading people away from their true, pure religion... so to honor God they are going to kill this troublemaker who disagreed with their expertise.

It's crazy what religion can do to us...

And I have a feeling for a lot of you, religion has caused a lot of pain...

- Told you you weren't good enough, didn't measure up
- Was used as a weapon to establish someone's authority over you
- Or to make sure you knew they were better than you.

Maybe left, walked away, not sure still believe b/c someone put their view of scripture/religion above actually caring about you

Look at me... That is not the NEW Jesus brought, taught, and died and rose again to make a reality.

God is not mad at you. He relentlessly loves you. He is for you. If someone will die for you they are for you.

Jesus offers you, all of us, a new life of freedom, love, purpose, and joy.

But we don't find it in a list of rules... we find it in Him.

Art of Following Jesus circle... you think those things are for God to impress him? No they are for us... to know him, enjoy him, and to better experience the life he offers...

Knowing and following Jesus is infinitely better than knowing and following a religion of rules.

All you have to do is keep your eyes on Jesus... follow him... allow him to show you how much he loves you... learn to trust that love and stop worrying about what others have made it...

Now I know this can be scary for some of us who are used to and comfortable to religion... b/c religion gives us a list to follow so we know if we are in or out.

- And lucky for us we are good at staying in... or at least finding the loopholes that make us think we are still in even if we aren't perfect.

A life with Jesus without rules is scary b/c we don't have the control... we have nothing to manipulate God with... We have no loopholes... all we have is a God who completely knows us yet loves us completely.

And we get scared b/c now we can;t control others... and they can do whatever they want?

Yeah they do get to do whatever they want... b/c **when you know Jesus' love what you want to do is love like Jesus.**

- It's like we don't actually believe the HS can guide people like God promised. **Jer. 31:33**

YOU: So whether you have been hurt by religion/religious people or maybe you're realizing you've been trying to earn God's favor with your piety/religiosity...

Read: Matt 11:28-30 and Gal 5:6b

Pray: Jesus, thank you for accepting and loving me. Teach me to follow you and you only.

Then instead of asking, "Is this right or wrong?" ... **Ask, "What does Jesus' love look like right now?"**

WE: Listen... Jesus is the proof that the creator of the universe loves you and accepts you... there is nothing you have to earn it... nothing you have to prove...

When we accept it, our lives are changed forever... We are free to simply enjoy who God really is, his love for us, who he made us to be... and we are free to invite our neighbors to discover, enjoy, and share the life Jesus offers... together.

The story of Jesus is the story of true love and freedom.