

The Story of Jesus

Part 35: Escaping the Prison of Religion. [Is Love Really All We need?]

Mark 12:28-34- [watch online](#)

Summary: Jesus simplified the complexity of religion into one ethic: Love. But to know what love really looks like we have to discover the heart of God that frees us from burdensome religion.

[00:00] Key Thoughts:

[01:43] Religion often feels like a prison rather than a path to freedom.

[02:20] When we discover the heart of God, we discover true freedom.

[03:07] When we truly search for the heart of God, we won't be satisfied with mere religion.

[04:30] The more we love God the more we discover who we are.

[06:15] True love for God flows out of God's true love for us.

[07:00] Love for God is cultivated and demonstrated by our love for others.

[07:59] Love is seeing someone's worth and choosing to help them flourish

[10:43] Loving like Jesus is simple but demanding.

[15:16] The love of Jesus gives us the freedom to love without rules.

Invitation:

Allow Jesus to love your neighbor through you...

- Pick one person you find hard to love
- Read Hosea 6:6 and pray for one good thing to happen to them each day for 5 days.

Discussion Questions:

1. Has religion ever felt like a prison to you?
2. Jon said, "When we truly search for the heart of God, we won't be satisfied with mere religion." What do you think he meant? Do you agree or disagree?
3. Read Hosea 6:6. In what ways do you think a focus on rules and regulations can keep us from authentically loving God and others?
4. Think about a person or group that is hard for you to love and/or understand (you don't have to share who they are.) What practical steps can you take this week to love your neighbor as yourself?
5. How can your group pray with you this week?

Transcript:

ME: Confession: I find certain religious people exhausting.

Take their religion so seriously...

- Have rules for everything and expect everyone to follow them
- See the world in black and white,

It's exhausting b/c I constantly feel on edge around them...

- Worried I'll say the wrong thing, wear the wrong thing, do the wrong thing...
- Or worst of all... let it slip that I believe the wrong thing!

I either have to pretend to be something I'm or fight the urge to offend them just to get it over with.

WE: Have you been there and experienced this?

It's frustrating but also makes me sad...

Imagine scrutinizing everything you do through, every interaction through an exhaustive set of do's and don'ts.

- Exhausting/overwhelming/guilt inducing

Maybe sounds like your childhood.

- Or interactions with a family member/friend/or co-worker
- Someone w/ a strict list of rules they expect everyone to follow.

Religion often feels like a prison rather than a path to freedom.

- Maybe why you gave up or someone you love has given up on religion.

Can this really be what God wants for us?

- To always be striving after perfection and feeling guilty when we never reach it?
- Never being free to actually enjoy life and just be who we are?

There's a better way... Jesus called it the Kingdom of God.

- In the KoG we can truly know God, know his heart and discover our true humanity,
- We can find the freedom to be who we were created to be.
- Don't have to hide anything and experience a rich, full, satisfying life.

When we discover the heart of God, we discover true freedom.

And we see it in one of the most famous passages from the Story of Jesus...

GOD: Background... Religious leaders have been trying to trap Jesus into saying something that will get him in trouble with the religious or civil authorities.

- But he's turned every trap back on them.

And one of the religious teachers has been curiously watching...

V. 28 This teacher of religious law has spent his life memorizing, reciting, and teaching the Law of Moses.

And though his colleagues were trying to trap Jesus... his question seems legitimate and thoughtful.

- Seems to be willing to look past just following religious rules to find the heart of God.

When we truly search for the heart of God, we won't be satisfied with mere religion.

Which seems to be why he asks this particular question...

There were 613 commands in the Law (1st 5 books- Torah)

Trying to remember, and obey/follow all 613 all the time... exhausting and impossible...

- Is there something that takes priority or sums up the rest?
- Something that reveals God's true heart behind the commands.

It's a question Jesus seems to have been waiting to answer...

V. 29-30 Quotes the Shema... the central prayer for the Jewish people.

The Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

There is one unchanging God who has revealed himself to humanity and can actually be known...

- A God who can be loved... and wants us to love him

Why? B/c he's some kind of insecure narcissist who needs his little peons to validate his Godness?

No, b/c it's what's best for us.

If we are created in God's image... then we find our true meaning/purpose, when we love and worship him.

The more we love God the more we discover who we are...

Jesus says... to love God with all of our... Heart - Soul - Mind - Strength

- Every part of our being...
- This love for God permeates and infuses every part of our life.
- Whatever we do flows out of this love for God.

But wait!! This is starting to smell like that overwhelming religion...

- Is it really about remembering all the commandments, following the right rules, and doing all the right prayers and rituals?

Let's use a family as an example (healthy families)

When a baby is born it's done nothing... but she is loved simply b/c she is their child.

As she grows and starts seeing the love and care she has been given she starts to reciprocate that love...

- She begins to know her parents... what makes them laugh, what makes them sad, etc.
- As she understands how much she is loved she can't help but want to be like the parents who love her.

How do your kids show you they love you?

Spend time with you, listen to you, talk to you... emulate you.

It is the same with God... As Apostle John said... we love b/c he first loved us.

- God demonstrates his love daily... every breath, every bite of food, every rain drop to water the world.

- He made the ultimate demonstration by dying for us.
- As we become more aware of how much we are worth to him we can't help but want to be more like him.
- True love for God flows out of God's true love for us.

How do we know God's love?

- Prayer, reading/studying scripture, listening to others, trusting him, purposely being aware of the good things he has done for you.

And knowing God's heart for us and the rest of humanity will lead to new actions...

V. 31 Love for God is cultivated and demonstrated by our love for others.

Is equally important... Can't do one without the other. Only doing one means you're not really doing either.

Loving God requires us to love what he loves... And what God loves most are his children.

- If you really love someone you love their kids too... can't help it.

But what does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself?

It's giving others the same respect, care, and worth we give ourselves.

Taking the labels off of people and seeing them for who they really are.

- Equal human beings created in the image of God and equally loved by our all-loving Heavenly Father

It is more than a vague feeling of goodwill toward humanity.

- Or sentimentality or hazy acceptance

Love is seeing someone's worth and choosing to help them flourish

- People who are nothing like us
- People who like nothing about us
- People who have purposely chosen to hurt us.

This type of love can only come from one place...

- Knowing God, knowing our worth to him, loving him from that place and having that love flow into every one of our interactions with others.

No commandment is greater... it's what every command was pointing to...

The teacher of religious law is impressed.

V. 32-34 You are right... Love is the true heart of God behind every other law.

- It is more important than even the sacrificial system.

Which is actually a very dangerous thing to be saying... if humans could live out these two commands then all the rest would become obsolete...

And Jesus says... you are so close to the KoG... you are almost there...

The time God promised is finally here... **Ezekiel 36:26-27**

- "I'm the one who will make it happen... you just have to choose to see it."

Jesus took the 613 laws of the Torah and boiled them down to one overarching ethic... LOVE.

- Not 100 laws... Not 10... Just 1
- Love God and let that love ignite a love for your neighbor.

He said his followers would be known by their love:

- Not their rules
- Not their list of beliefs
- Not their moral litmus tests
- Not how they vote

Now everyone agrees love is crucial right?

- Then why aren't we doing it?

Loving like Jesus is simple but demanding.

We love the idea but actually doing it is too hard and inconvenient.

To love my neighbor as myself means I have to identify with them

- Empathize with them
- Put myself in their shoes
- Accept that maybe I don't have all the facts and give them the benefit of the doubt.

To love people we have to know people.

Many claim, "To love [a group they oppose] we need to point out their sins.

- They want to tell these people the "truth in love"... but have never even spent time with them or empathized with them

Is that how YOU want to be loved?

- Have someone who doesn't even know you point out what THEY think you're doing wrong?

Loving your neighbor as yourself means loving as you want to be loved.

Love is personal. It means getting to know people to understand how best to help them flourish.

- Maybe the change you want in them isn't what God wants to change in them.
- Instead of trying to change people, start serving them

Jesus never treated people based on society's label

- Whether tax collectors, foreigners, or sinners.
- He saw each person as bearing God's image and met them where they were... even before they repented.

YOU: Allow Jesus to love your neighbor through you [Not JF... Don't have to do it]

Pick one person you find hard to love... Don't have to know them.

- Maybe don't get along
- Maybe belong to a group you disagree with
- Maybe just rub you the wrong way

Read Hosea 6:6 and pray for one good thing to happen to them each day for 5 days.

- Not that they will change their mind or agree w/ you
- But that they will succeed/flourish in some way
- Pray for their relationships. Health, work, anything good you'd want for yourself.

[Hosea 6:6 with a line for the person's name]

And you will begin to experience God's love changing your heart.

- God wants them to know his love.
- He wants you to know his love for them.
- As he changes your heart towards that person you will gain a greater insight into the heart of God.
- Do this, maybe make it a habit, and you will become a clearer reflection of Heavenly Father whose image you bear.

WE: This type of love is not wishful dreaming. Not just an ideal we can never achieve but can only use as a good example...

This is who Jesus said he was making people into... this is what Jesus said he was bringing to the human race.

This is what Jesus said his followers would be known for. This is what he expects his followers to be known for.

Through the love of Jesus we truly can love God with everything we are and love our neighbors as ourselves.

What if JF's actually lived this way?

What if we refused to see people through labels and saw them as fellow image bearers of God whom we are called to love.

What if our first reaction to people wasn't fear or judgment but unconditional love and acceptance... just as our Heavenly Father has given us?

Wouldn't you want to work with and for someone like that?

Wouldn't you want a neighbor like that?

Wouldn't you want your kids to marry someone like that?

Wouldn't you want to live with someone like that?

Wouldn't you have wanted to be raised by someone like that?

As Jf's we are called to be that someone for others.

Through the love of Jesus we can be that someone.

The love of Jesus gives us the freedom to love without rules.

Invitation

Allow Jesus to love your neighbor through you...

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- Read Hosea 6:6 and pray for one good thing to happen to them each day for 5 days.

_____ ,
I want you to show love, not offer sacrifices.
I want you to know me more than I want burnt offerings.

Hosea 6:6

Discussion Questions

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