

# INSIDE OUT

From the series *Why Jesus Hates Religion*

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**Reverend:** How many of you got your Bible? Raise it. All of you that have your Bible, all of that have a Bible, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up the light of His countenance and give you peace. And those without your Bibles, Lord be sort of nice to you, but that's it. So please bring your bibles because we want to make them a great tool for you.

Now, what changes a life? That's what we're talking about today. You know there's three kinds of people it seems like: People who are on a diet, people who think they need to be on a diet, and people who are eating so they will soon need to be on a diet. And I have two friends that just went on a diet and you know, it's no fun to be around them because they're trying to lose weight so they did this bet. They're going, "Okay, let's bet." And they're going to bet money, because money motivates people. Right? And I said, "Money's not going to motivate you. I know what motives, shame motivates.

So what you've got to do is if you're real serious, the one who doesn't get the weight, if you don't get to the weight by the end of the month, then – or this was like three month ago, so it's the end of this month, you have to post a picture of yourself in a speedo on your uh on your refrigerator. So shame. I'm a Baptist, I know what motivates people. This is what works. So, that's what they did and I'll tell you one thing. I won't tell you who it is, but I wouldn't go to Paul Mephs [ph] house because he's going to lose that bet. So. I can't say that. So. What does motivate? Is it shame? You know. Is it – Then how do you lose weight? Is it just learning information, you know. Or is it – Mostly when it comes to losing weight, it's an all outside in. You just you know, stop eating and you lose weight. Take more exercise. And is that basically what changes a spiritual life? Just change the externals, you just stop doing certain things. It will change your heart. Right? Because that's basically what we think. But it isn't true.

You know, the problem with religion, is that religion is basically an outside in approach. It's says, what's going to change your heart? What's going to change your character? What's going to change your inside? What's going to change your relationship with God? Is if you just change the way you live, figure out the boxes and check them, change the external, then God will see your hard work and your effort and He will love you and bless you and accept you because your working so hard. And the opposite is true. If you don't find out the rules and follow the rules and you don't what God wants, then God will not love you, and He will not bless you, and He will not accept you. And that's what religions believes. Religion is an outside in. Where I'm going to change my heart is by just changing the way that I act.

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C.S. Lewis, who is a professor at Oxford, studies the major religions of the world. Later in his life, he became a believer, but earlier he studied the major religions and he found out that all religions, Judaism, Muslim, Christianity, New Age, all of them, have one thing in common. They all have a list of things that you're supposed to do or not do. And uh and he boiled it down to eight.



So I'm going to just tell you the eight things all religions have in common. First it says don't harm others in word or deed. Secondly, it says you're to honor your parents. Third, be kind to siblings and elderly. Be honest in all of your dealings, don't lie. Don't have sex with another person's spouse, the sixth one. Seventh, care for the the poor, the marginalized. And uh the eighth one is put other first, sort of the Golden Rule.

So, all religions have a list of things that you're supposed to do. All religions have that in common. And you know the second thing that all religions have in common? Everyone fails to meet the list. Right? So let's just go through the list and see if that's true.

First of all, anybody here never harm somebody in word or deed? You've never harmed someone? Okay so you're all a failure right there. And that's just number one. Number two, you're supposed to honor – or two and three, you're supposed to honor parents and siblings. Any of you, you know, fail at some point to honor your siblings or older people. You know just because they're old and they can't get around. Right? Jim. Okay, so that would be an example of somebody not – so you go, you know – anybody – so you'll do that. Anybody of you tempted to lie about lying? You know or – you know when does anybody have sex with another person's spouse? Can't really deal with that one. Right? So you – how many of you know somebody that's violated yeah that one.

So, the point is, is that every religion has a list. Okay? And everyone has failed the list. So what do you do? So universally this is what people say, "It doesn't matter what religion you choose. Just pick one and start working at it, and that's your road to God." Because all roads lead to God – all religious roads lead to God. And it makes sense, doesn't it? If basically they all have sort of the same list, if you all work at the list – you know – doesn't – pick Islam, pick Christianity, pick any of them. Just get at it, do your best, because if you work hard, do you best, God will see you working hard, He will love you and bless you and that's your way to please God. And the surprise is Jesus hates religion.

And I know lots of you are offended by that because you're saying, "Didn't Jesus start the largest religion in the world, Christianity?" My question to you would be, "Everything that is called Christian, is the Bible and what Jesus says?" There's a whole lot of things that call itself Christian that have nothing to do with the Bible and what Jesus says. And the point is, is that Jesus says, "All religions lead the same place, but they don't lead to God." They lead to disappointment, and sadness because in the most critical moments in your life, when you've depended on religion and you need something that really will give you supernatural help, that will change your heart, that will make you a new person, religion will fall flat.

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Jesus said no religion leads to God. Ultimately, the reason that they killed Jesus is because he said that there is only one way to God and it's through Me. Jesus did not come to create a religion, he came to dismantle religion. And that's why people killed him. And so we're looking at does Jesus hate religion, and so we're going to talk about that and we're going to let you look at some things and you kind of get to decide for yourself.

So, if you got a Bible, turn to Luke chapter 18. Luke chapter 18, you got – if you're new to your Bible, there's the Old Testament that's about two thirds of the Bible, and then on the far right is the – I mean the Old Testament is two thirds on the left side of your Bible. New Testament is about one third on the right and then it goes – first book in the New Testament is...

**Congregation:** Matthew.

**Reverend:** Then...

**Congregation:** Mark.

**Revered:** Then...

**Congregation:** Luke.

**Revered:** That's right. Third book, and if that doesn't help, look at the Table of Contents. All right. Because you got to learn how to use your Bible. Okay. Luke chapter 18. Why did Jesus tell this story? "Then Jesus told this story, to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else." See the Bible's a very complicated book, very hard. So I know this is a tricky question. And so why is Jesus telling this story?

**Congregation:** [inaudible 0:07:31]

**Revered:** Really? Okay, I'll read it again. "Jesus told *this* story *some* who had *great confidence*" in what? Their own righteousness and "they scorned everyone else." That's a problem with Jesus. So if you trust in your own righteousness and you kind of look at other people and you're a little bit better than them, this story is for you. All right. I know, right away you go, "But that's not me." You know, "I don't trust in my own righteousness... not as bad as that person does." See then, you're in trouble see. It's the point. Okay.

"Two men went to the Temple to pray, one was a Pharisee and the other was a despised tax collector." Two people, he's going to contrast them. "The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer, 'I thank you God that I am not a sinner like everyone else, for I don't cheat, I don't sin and I don't commit adultery. And I am certain – certainly not like that tax collector. I fast twice a week and I give a tenth of my income.' But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead he beat his chest in sorrow saying, 'Oh God, be merciful to me. Oh God, be merciful to me. Oh God would you be merciful to me, I am a sinner.' I tell you this not the Pharisee returned home justified before God for those – I tell you this sinner, not the Pharisee returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

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This is why Jesus hates religion because religion leads to a focus on the externals, checking boxes and believe if I do what's right then God will love me instead of this powerful humility, open hands that says, "God, I trust You and You alone. Every day, my life is like this. God, it's all about You. I'm waiting on you because I can't wait on my job, I can't wait on the economy, I can't wait on politics, I can't wait on anything else to change my life. I'm waiting on You because You are my only hope."

So He contrasts these two people, first of all the Pharisee. The Pharisee is a religious person, this is a religious super star. These are the people who set the bar, the highest is doing really good. They were recognized as doing good. They dressed different, they ate different. They were better than everyone else. Um So the Pharisee you see in this passage, stands off by himself because – the reason he stands off by himself is Pharisee means "separate." I'm different than you, I'm not a part of this world, I live a better life, I don't go partying and drinking and get drunk, and I don't cheat in business. I'm just better than you. He's like the people who sit in first class. You know, you walk on the plane and they're looking at you going, "I'm better than you. I got on first, you know I got wider seats, you know. You go to the back, I'm going to close the little door, don't you come up to our bathroom, we're better. And eat better food." They're just better. It's just like that. All right? They, they are different and they're "separate from."

In those days, the people – you know he prays out loud. Now both the Pharisee and the tax collector pray out loud, that's not – that's just the way that they did it in those days. So there's no contrast there. And then his prayer, powerful prayer, isn't it? He says, "God I thank you that I'm not a sinner like the rest of these people, I – you know, I don't cheat, I don't commit adultery, and I'm not like that tax collector," which is the equivalent of saying, "God, you know, thank you I'm not as bad as the people in my business who lie and cheat and steal. I'm not like those people from the city of Bell who cheated the whole city. I'm not like the people of Wall Street that are so greedy you know – I'm not bad like them." Because I know, you know none of us pray like that. And then, not only does he compare, and the second thing he says is he says, "Besides that, I'm obedient. I fast twice a week" where the law in the Old Testament only required that you fast one time a year, that was in Yom Kippur. And then the second thing he says, "And I give a tenth of my income." And what he's saying is, "I'm a good person. I, I'm doing the religious checklist." And Pharisees did. And their religious checklist wasn't just what was in the Old Testament, they became religious about it.

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They took God's law, for instance, they said, "Remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy. Six days you're supposed to work, the seventh day you're supposed to rest." But how do you know what rest is? And how do you know how much work is work? I mean is it – can you walk a block and is that work? Can you create a meal, is that work? And because people – you know, we can't just trust you to make these decisions yourself, they wrote a book called the Talmud, which was eight to twelve volumes of rules. And just take the Sabbath, remember the Sabbath day? They created 600 rules to help you not break the Sabbath day. That's my idea of a good time. And so, you know they do it. And that's what the Pharisees did. They set the standard really high. And the whole point was it's all about the rules, I'm following the rules, I'm doing what I say.

And then in the prayer, who is the prayer addressed to? If you look carefully, and if you've got a Bible, circle the word "I" in your Bible. How many times does he use the word I? Eight times. "I'm so glad that I'm not a sinner and I'm not a thief, and I'm not bad like this tax collector, and I am good and I give a tithe and" you know – Who's he praying to? Himself. And he's praying to the crowd, he's giving his public resume. I'm so glad that you're here today because I have been particularly good and I have not sinned like that...

And this prayer, is there any courage in this prayer? Is there any boldness in this prayer? Does it take any courage to pray, "God thank you that I am good and faithful and not bad as these other people and that I've been, you know, I've been giving to You." There's no – there's no courage, there's no honesty, there's no authenticity. This is a really easy prayer to pray. And so he's talking about his obedience. And this is why Jesus had such a hard time with the religious people because Jesus had to keep saying to them, "You say, 'Don't commit murder,' but I say, 'If you have anger in your heart, that's the same as killing someone'" – you as killing someone in God's eyes. You know, it's not the same in this world's eyes, but it's the same as far as sin. "You say, 'Don't commit adultery,' but I'm saying that 'If you look with lust, that's, that's, that's a big sin.'" You say, you know – if I – if I give just this much, but I say, 'You've got to be generous and not materialistic and constantly want more.'" You know, "You say, you've got to be mostly honest," you know and follow the things when you say, "I really, really promise." "And I'm saying, 'You just be honest all the time.'"

And the point is, Jesus is saying, "You don't get it. You keep thinking that you're better than you are. The standards are way high." Paul said because he understood Jesus, he says, "I'm the worst



sinner I know. I'm the chief among sinners." And a person who really comes to Jesus, that's what every one of us can say, "I'm the worst sinner." Why? I'll tell you. I am the worst sinner I know because I know my heart and I know what I think, I know where my mind goes, and it's ugly. And I can pretend it's not that way, but I'm the worst sinner I know.

So this Pharisee is very confident because of his own righteousness and because he looks at everyone else and says, look at the people out there. Look at the people that you do business with. You should feel good about yourself. Look at you, you're in church, aren't you better than the people that you know are in your offices and in your neighborhoods that just went partying last night and are barely awake and still have a hangover? [cough] Okay. You're smart not to answer that.

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Contrast that with the tax collector. Tax collector is um in the Temple, he is [cough] doing the right thing, he's where he should be and he's praying, but his attitude is very different. Now he stands at a distance. But why does he stand at a distance? Does he stand at a distance because he's first-class, better than? This is where we talk. Good. Thank you. Two of us know this. All right. The rest of us – No, the reason that he's standing at a distance is because he knows he's a bad guy. I mean, he's cheated people at the Temple, and he knows that people – you know when he walks in, people are going to go, "What are you doing here? You cheated at business, you're that bad guy. You know – we – you're one of those Bell officials. You probably – What do you think you're doing at church?" Like, where should they be if not here? But you know, so he knows he's going to be judged, so that's a huge hurdle for him to show up.

Secondly, he knew – you know he's got this huge, we all do – if we are really bad person, what's the biggest hurdle for us to get to God? We think we should be better. I got to clean up my life, I can't just show up in this mess. I've got to pull it together, I've got to do some things to earn God's love. And the third hurdle, I think that he's got to jump over is that belief that if I show up in the mess that I'm in, cheating people, hurting people, lied to people, and I haven't even tried to fix it, I think God will just zap me if I show up.

Those are three big hurdles. And so he, as timidly as he can, he shows up in the Temple, in the right place. It's the place you're supposed to meet God. And he stands at a distance because he's going, "I am so lame. And I'm pretty sure God won't even love me. I'm sure there's not enough grace in this world to forgive me. I'm pretty sure that god can't accept me, but this is the only shot that I've got." You know why he shows up in the Temple? Because he's tried everything else, he's tried money and power and cheating everybody. He's tried feel good hits, he's tried to fix himself. I bet you, he's tried everything and he couldn't get – and he is just undone.

So he shows up and says – and it says he can't even lift his head. He stands afar off and he just bows his head, beats his chest and says, "God, would you be merciful to me? Could You forgive me? Is there any love in the universe for me? And he stands with open hands, going, "I've got nothing. I don't have a promise. I can't say 'I'll be better. I'll try harder. Maybe I can.'" He says, "God, would you be merciful to me?" He's empty. And here is the great surprise – and when people heard Jesus told this story, this part of it would have caused people to gasp.

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When Jesus says in 18:14, “I tell you this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God.” Okay, you missed it. Do the uh [inhale gasp]. Okay everybody together. A little bit more. A little bit of a gasp of surprise. All right? On cue, here it is and this is the way it would have sounded. “I tell you this, sinner – I tell you this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God.”

**Congregation:** [gasp]

**Reverend:** That’s the way they would have heard it. Kenton in the white spaces. “For those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humbled themselves will be exalted.” The surprise would have staggered them. The Pharisee? The guy who’s trying so hard to follow the rules, do the externals, change his heart by doing everything right? Saying, “If I do this, if I do that, I’ll be a good person, I’ll be what God wants, that guy never gets forgiveness and love? He comes with all of his works and he doesn’t get grace and mercy? All of his efforts doesn’t do anything? He walks away still holding all of this sin and the weight of his sin.

And this tax collector, city from Bell, guys that you know cheated in the uh the uh the the uh the Wall Street guys, you know that you know caused you know the worst people you can think. This is one of those guys. He’s the guy who cheated his fellow citizens. This guy comes in and says, “God, would you be merciful to me?” And he walks away declared – he’s righteous? And what does that mean?

On your outlines because it kind of outline it so make sure that you understand. You know. First of all because he is authentic, it leads to humility, He says, you know, this guy is justified. And then what does it mean. It says that he is cleansed from sin and he has the power from light.

Romans 8:1, so now – in fact just read this first verse to me that belongs – end up in Jesus. Okay. You probably don’t know what I said. Just stop when I give you the cue. All right. Read the first verse, fill God’s house. “So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.” One more time. “So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.”

The surprise is the Pharisee comes in – I see one, two, three, four of you get it. All right. He comes in and the Pharisee walks away and he – with his sin walks away with his sin. But the tax collector comes with his sin and Jesus takes it and he says, “there’s no condemnation to those who belong to Christ Jesus.” And because you belong to Him, the power of the life-giving spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving us His son as a sacrifice for our sins.

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This is the good news, when Jesus came. He says, “I’m not bring you religious news, I’m brining you good news, and it’s good news for everyone. “ For Jewish people, for you know people of every ethnic group. People who lived in the Middle East and not just people who lived in the first century, but people who lived all time. And the good news is there is forgiveness for your sins. Jesus died on the cross for our sin in our place for our brokenness. And everyone who trusted Jesus, who comes like this tax collector, just open hands saying, “There’s nothing in – I’ve got nothing. Cut. But if You would forgive me, if You would love me.” Those people receive forgiveness and are made right. They have forgiveness from sin and freedom from sin because the power of the spirit comes into their life and then they’re a new person. This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person and the old is gone, a new life has begun. This is the good news.

Now look at the back of your outline. That's the message, we understand that. For those of you that have been around church, if you call yourself a Christ-follower, a Christian, that's the essence of Christianity. It's a relationship with Jesus. That's why all the time we say Christianity isn't a religion. It is a relationship. No, all religions, you know, say they lead to God. Jesus says no religion leads to God. Only Jesus leads to God. He says, "I'm the way, the truth, and the life. The only way you can have a relationship with God is through Me."

So where are we Pharisee-like? Uh immediately you go, "But, I'm not a Pharisee." But here's ways that we're Pharisee-like. When we say, "You what? I'm not that bad." When we rename sin or we minimize sin and we say, "I'm not as – man look at those people, they really stole, they were really greedy, those people, boy they blow marriages apart. I'm not as bad as them." And all we're going when we do that, is we're minimizing our own sin, which is a very dangerous thing to do because as soon as we start to minimize and rename our sin, then we start to have confidence in our own righteousness. And it goes like this, you know, "So I got a little lose in the turn, I went to church." "So you know, I did a few – I went partying or maybe I self medicated a little bit more than I should over the weekend, but you know what? I showed up at church. I even threw some money in the deal. Hey I'm for the – you know, I want Samuel to get his truck and well, I'll give a little bit to that. I'm" – See what are you doing right there? That's a Pharisee.

Because what we're saying is, "Why God should You forgive me? Because? I'm doing something. I'm doing something. I'm bringing my good works, I'm brining my effort, I'm bringing my checklist. I'm doing some things that You expect of me." And then as a result of that we trade off sin from it. And then when we look at our prayers – and this is what hit me this week, when we look at our prayer life, when you pray as a Pharisee, you tend to pray really safe prayers.

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"God I need a little help." Really? That's all you need? And what's sad is, I started writing my prayers down this week and I looked at my prayers and they are wimpy, pathetic, small little prayers. "God, I need a little help in this area. I was a little insensitive to my wife." I'm not cruel, I'm a little insensitive. "I got a little loose in the turns this week, but I don't call it 'sin.' I don't call it 'anger,' I don't call it 'lust,' I don't call it 'selfishness,' I don't call it 'pride.'" I just write down, "I got a little loose in the turns" because that makes me feel comfortable and then when I write these pathetic statement, and I say, "And besides God," – you know, in so many words, "I'm trying. And I'm doing the best, can't you see?" And do you see the death of that lie because it is the Pharisaical lie. "God, see my good works, see how I'm trying, now love me and bless me and answer my prayers."

But that's not the way the tax collector came to God. He said, "God, could you love me and bless me, there's nothing that I bring in my hands." And we see that God loves us and blesses us when we bring nothing, and then our response is, "God, I want to follow You and I want to obey." I'm not saying that we don't – that you know, we're not obedient or we don't follow what God wants. But the Pharisee says, "I will follow what you want, God, so that you will love me and bless me." But that is always a dead end and I never get what I want from God when I'm trying to earn it. I never get what I want from God when I try to earn it—I think can earn it, I think that I deserve it. The only way I get what I need from God is when I wait on the Lord. I say, "God, I've got nothing." And towards the end of the week, I started to write out my prayers and my prayers became more desperate. That's the mark of the tax collector's prayer. "God, I need You." If I'm ever going to change my selfishness, if I'm ever going to change my pride, if I'm ever going to change my heart,

it's not going to be from the outside in, it's not because I'm going to do things. God, if you will change me, I, I can see all experiences change – I will follow You with a full heart. I will love you because you bless me. And I am motivated to follow and to be obedient because God loves me and blesses me. That's where the tax collector is. Where are you like a Pharisee? I am so Pharisaical in my prayers, my prayers are not desperate, they're comfortable and they're safe because I'm depending on my goodness.

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And then you look at – you look at Matthew 23. If you start to be comfortable in it, Matthew 23, it's on your outline. “What sorry awaits you teachers of the religious law, you Pharisees, hypocrites, you're like white washed tombs, beautiful on the outside, but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

Here, you know, Jesus is using a picture that in the first century would have just popped because I know, you think – how many of you think that uh uh a tombstone is an attractive thing? Right. So you're going, what is he talking about? You know, “You look like tombstones.” What would happen is, during the time that the the Jewish people had to travel to Jerusalem, they would paint all the tombstones white so they'd be bright white and they'd be attractive when they weren't the rest of the year. The reason was, when you're going to the Temple, you wanted to worship and connect with God. And in the Old Testament there's lots of ways to become unclean. And remember, the Old Testament is the trailer to the movie. The movie is? Jesus is the right answer. The movie is Jesus. That's the Old Testament. Everything in the Old Testament, Jesus says in John 5, “You studied the scriptures, which is good, and they teach of me.” So the Old Testament's the trailer to Jesus. Jesus is the movie. So there is this uncleanness. People would become unclean. And they only way that you could, you know – you'd have – there was ways to become clean, ceremonially clean.

But if you were going to the Temple to connect with God and you were to touch a tombstone, which is a powerful picture of death, which is the ultimate consequence of sin, or you were to touch a dead body, you couldn't go to the Temple because you were unclean. Ultimately then what's this picture of cleanliness? How do I get clean? Coming to Jesus, Jesus is the answer because He cleanses my heart. And so, he says to these Pharisees, “You look really good, you look like those” – He would have been pointing to them because He was going to Jerusalem. “See those tombstones all painted white? You look like that. But inside you're dead because you trust in your outward. You think that you bring something in God's hand. And the worst part is, there is deadness in you and everybody who touches you or gets around you, you create more deadness. You make it so that people can't even come to God,” Jesus says to them. Because you think it's all about rules. It's about checking a list and all God wants is one thing. Just come with open hands and open heart and say, “I am absolutely lost. I am absolutely undone.”

The tax collector comes and he realizes the only hope he has is if You will change my heart. And if God will change our heart, then everything will ultimately change because once you're changed at the very core of your being, and He's making you loving, and kind though his spirit and patient and forgiving and generous, that begins to move out. We're obedient people. We follow what Jesus says. Not to become righteous, but because He has changed us. He's given us a different motivation, and our heart radiates out through our life. And we're amazed by it too. Look at what God's done. He's making me more loving and we join Him in the work that He's doing.

And we can fall into the dangers – you know, what were the big dangers for the tax collector? Start to pretend that he was better, and we’ll talk about that next week, what is hypocrisy and why Jesus hated hypocrisy so much. But the other things that are dangerous is that when we think, “You know, I’ve got to start to earn it. Now I understand that I was saved by grace, but don’t I have to work and deserve it now – you know, because I was a spectacular sinner before I came to Jesus, but you know, I came because I knew I was broken.” But the dangerous part now is for us to – we start to come to God saying, “But God, I’m doing good and I’m not so bad and I’m better than I once was.” And the danger in that is to not come before Jesus saying, “I am desperate. I am as desperate in need of forgiveness as I’ve ever been. I am as desperate in need of heart change as I’ve ever been. There is nothing that I’m bringing in my hands that ultimately can earn your love or deserve your love, God. If you don’t love me today, if you don’t forgive me again today, I am not going to make it.”

In the Old Testament there’s this picture of yeast and during the festival of Yom Kippur you’re supposed to go through your house and find all the yeast and take it out. It was the fun family event where’d you go, “Let’s the yeast and get it out of here.” What was the picture? The idea that you know, go through your life and enjoy looking at every nook and cranny and finding the sin because in Yom Kippur was this idea of covering, atonement. And for us as believers, the idea of going and looking at every place in your sin, where there’s bitterness, there’s anger, there’s lack of forgiveness, where there’s pettiness between you and your parents, you and your siblings, you and your coworkers, and you say, “I’m going to look for that” because when I find it, what do you get to do with sin? You get to bring it to Jesus and say, “Here it is. Could you forgive me for it and could you give me the power to change this in my life?” And it gives me boldness to identify it and to name it and not be ashamed of it and think, “Oh, I’ll work it out.” I bring it to Jesus because ultimately, only He can forgive me and make it right.

One more passage, Matthew 5, this is just one more way of saying it. Jesus – you know, you think Jesus loves religion? Look at this. “I warn you, unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of the religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Now when people first hear that this is the way they would have heard it. “Unless you can long jump – what’s the world’s record for long jump? Thirty feet? Unless you can long jump further than thirty feet, unless you can pole vault further than – you know, higher than twenty-two feet – What’s the world’s record for most free throws in a row? 2036. All right? So unless you can shoot better than 2036 free throws in a row, you can’t get into the kingdom of heaven. And all God’s people went? Yeah.

[0:33:12]

Who gets in? You know if that – because that’s sort of what He’s saying. He’s going, “You’ve got to be better than the best.” These are the religious all stars and you’ve got to be better than they are. And the people would have gone, “How can I do that?” And here’s His point. What is there way to make themselves right with God? External. It is by finding the list, obeying the rules, and if I obey the rules, I am right with God. And Jesus is saying, “You’ve got to find a greater righteousness than that. You can’t make it by following the rules, by being religious, by checking the boxes.” What have you got to do? You’ve got to find the righteousness of the tax collector. What was that? Open-handed. “Jesus, I’ve got nothing by my sin and brokenness. I can’t earn Your love, I can’t deserve Your love. God, would you be merciful to me, a sinner?”



It is us trusting every day in Jesus saying, “Jesus, will you forgive, will you wash me clean, and will you make me right? I can’t bring anything in my hands, it’s You and You alone that make me right.” I’m going to – you know. And when that happens, we see Jesus changing our heart. It’s His power, the power of the Spirit that changes us every day and makes us into the kind of person that we want to be. Our lifestyle is a lifestyle like this before Jesus. Jesus, I love you. It’s not just me doing things, it’s about being in love with you and when I see Your love and the power of You changing my life, I want to follow You, I want to give my whole life to You.

And so – we’ve left some time at the end of this service to worship and to respond to God because I want you to hear God’s Spirit. Because I think that one of the hardest journey’s for people who have been in church for a bunch of years is to see the creeping Pharisaical heart that comes into our life. I think it’s just natural for us. Jesus spent all this time – always talking to the Pharisees saying, “Don’t you understand, you look so good on the outside, but you’re full of death. You’re re – you’re taking sin and you’re minimizing it. You want to call it nice words, it’s not nice words. It’s destructive to your soul. If you bring it to Me, there’s forgiveness and there’s love.” It’s that creeping attitude that makes us look at other people and say, “I’m not as bad as they are.” And so when I sin, it’s easy for me to go, “Since I’m not as bad as they are, God, you got to cut me a little slack because I’m doing good.”

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And the danger of that heart that says, “God, look at the good that I’m doing.” Is creeping legalism that focuses on externals and rule keeping and thinking that I’m right by – with God because I’m keeping the rules. It’s that creeping legalism. I want us to think about that. And hear God’s voice. And say in your own heart, “God, is there any place that my Christianity is getting in the way of my relationship with You, my religiousness is getting in my relationship with You?”

And maybe for some of you that never have really come to Jesus, you’ve been trusting in religious things your whole life. Maybe for you it’s time to come like the tax collector and say, “Oh God, would you be merciful to me? I am a sinner, I see it. Is there grace for me? There’s nothing – I’ve got no hope without – I’m going to wait on You. Not on my works, my effort. I’m going to wait on You. Would you listen to God’s voice as we worship together?

Please bow your heads, close your eyes. Let’s pray together. Father, in these moments, will You speak to us? Will You lead us? Will You show to us places in our hearts where we’re looking at the rules and checking boxes and we’ve lost the wonder of You love for us, the freedom that forgiveness brings, the thrill of your grace, because we’re following rules? God, would you speak to our heart and draw us close to you again because of Your amazing grace?

[Music 0:37:47-0:38:03]

[End of Audio]