

Religious People

Message 02 of the series, "Jesus Saves"

"This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'—and I am the worst of them all." 1 Timothy 1:15 (NLT)

I. Jesus came into the world to save sinners like the religious leaders.

- a. The religious leaders needed saving because they valued popularity/position more than following God.

Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in grave clothes, his face wrapped in a head cloth. Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him go!" Many ...believed in Jesus when they saw this happen. But some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. "What are we going to do?" they asked each other. "This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation." Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, "You don't know what you're talking about! You don't realize that it's better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed. He did not say this on his own; as high priest at that time he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation. And not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world." John 11:43-52 (NLT)

Note: Jesus came to die as the ransom for our souls, NOT to seek popularity or titles.

"You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25-28 (NLT)

- b. The religious leaders needed saving because they valued appearances over doing the right thing.

Very early in the morning the leading priests and the elders met again to lay plans for putting Jesus to death. Then they bound him, led him away, and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor. When Judas, who had betrayed him, realized that Jesus had been condemned to die, he was filled with remorse. So he took the thirty pieces of silver back to the leading priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he declared, "for I have betrayed an innocent man." "What do we care?" they retorted. "That's your problem." Then Judas threw the silver coins down in the Temple and went out and hanged himself. The leading priests picked up the coins. "It wouldn't be right to put this money in the Temple treasury," they said, "since it was payment for murder." After some discussion they finally decided to buy the potter's field, and they made it into a cemetery for foreigners. That is why the field is still called the Field of Blood.

Matthew 27:1-8 (NLT)

Note: Jesus values authenticity and hates hypocrisy.

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too... you are like whitewashed 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." Matthew 23:25-28 (NLT)

- c. The religious leaders needed saving because they valued keeping rules above everything else.

"Jesus' trial before Caiaphas ended in the early hours of the morning. Then he was taken to the headquarters of the Roman governor. His accusers didn't go inside because it would defile them, and they wouldn't be allowed to celebrate the Passover." John 18:28 (NLT)

Note: Jesus said the most important rules are loving God and loving others.

"...an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?' Jesus replied, 'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." Matthew 22:35-40 (NLT)

“For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being circumcised or being uncircumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love.” Galatians 5:6 (NLT)

- d. The religious leaders needed saving because they thought they could trust in their own righteousness.

The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. “He saved others,” they scoffed, “but he can’t save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him! He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” Matthew 27:41-43 (NLT)

Note: Jesus’ death on the cross is the only way any of us can be made righteous.

“For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are. But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood.” Romans 3:20-25 (NLT)

“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

II. **Jesus came into the world to save sinners like us.**

“But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!” Matthew 5:20 (NLT)

- Do I value popularity or position more than following God?
- Do I value appearances more than righteousness?
- Do I value keeping rules more than a relationship with Jesus or others?
- Do I think I am righteous enough apart from Christ?
- Do I believe God accepts me based on my performance?

“Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent.” Luke 5:32 (NLT)

John Schmidt • 03-18-18 • john@centeringlives.com

Connect Group Discussion Questions

1. Do you think that there are still people today who look a lot like the religious leaders in Jesus' day? Can you list an example?
2. Read Matthew 23:25-28. Have you ever been hypocritical or self-righteous? What could cause someone to be that way?
3. In your opinion, what are the differences between religion and relationship?
4. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. What is the importance in knowing that you cannot earn salvation?
5. Read Romans 13:8-10. How do you think loving others fulfills the law of God?
6. Read Ephesians 5:1-2. Since we know that religion is based on rules while relationships are based on love, why do we struggle with living a life filled with love versus following a set of rules?

Quotations for discussion

"Beware of self-righteousness. The black devil of licentiousness destroys his hundreds, but the white devil of self-righteousness destroys his thousands." Charles Spurgeon

"Like Muslims we assume that God will judge us "on balance." If our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds, we will arrive safely in heaven. But, alas, if our evil deeds outweigh our good ones, we will suffer the wrath of God in hell. We may be "marred" by sin but in no wise devastated by it. We still have the ability to balance our sins with our own righteousness. This is the most monstrous lie of all." RC Sproul

"Self-righteousness....is the largest idol of the human heart - the idol which man loves most and God hates most. Dearly beloved, you will always be going back to this idol. You are always trying to be something in yourself, to gain God's favour by thinking little of your sin, or by looking to your repentance, tears, prayers; or by looking to your religious exercises..." Robert Murray McCheyne

"The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronizing and spoiling sport, and back-biting, the pleasures of power, of hatred... That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither." CS Lewis