



Reconstructing Our Faith
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The Crossing Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

OPENING

This week we are concluding our series called Dismantled. We live in a culture that is deconstructing our faith while at the same time is desperate for the hope that only followers of Christ and His church have. Maybe it's time to think less about converting the world and more about converting followers of Jesus and the Church back to Himself.

SCRIPTURE¹

Matthew 2-3 "The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, so you must be careful to do everything they tell you."

Matthew 23:3-4 (MSG) "It's all spit and polish veneer. Instead of giving God's Law as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. They seem to take pleasure in watching you stagger under these loads, and wouldn't think of lifting a finger to help."

1 Corinthians 11:17 In the following directives I have no praise for you for your meetings do more harm than good.

Matthew 3:17 (MSG) For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that through Him the world may be saved.

Matthew 11:28-30 (MSG) Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 5:13 You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

OBSERVATION

Jesus spoke some devastating words to the Pharisees. He took something that had been built up and seen as a source of authority and transformation and said, "It's empty and stands for nothing." Jesus is bringing the strongest possible rebuke to those who claimed to be His followers. He said that there was a foundation of truth on which the Pharisees were basing their teaching and lives, but the people must be wary of the way they were teaching it and practicing it! In Jesus' day there were four major sects in Judaism: **1) Sadducees:** They were the cultural

¹ The NIV translation unless otherwise indicated.

elite who cooperated with the Romans and were known for their compromises. **2) Essenes.** They were disgusted by those compromises and eventually withdrew into the wilderness as separatists. **3) Zealots.** They hated the Romans and anyone who cooperated with them. They would do anything including violence to establish God's Kingdom in their midst. Barabbas was one. **4) Pharisees.** They were a more thoughtful group. They didn't see political power as a means to seeing the Kingdom advanced. They saw adherence to the Law and holiness as the key.

QUESTION: Which group do you think you would have been part of if you had lived then?

The Pharisees were the group that Jesus took on. They consisted of about 11,000 members who had tremendous authority. They believed the Messiah was coming, the entire Old Testament and resurrection of the dead. So, of all the people alive at the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had a theology closest to His, but the way they practiced and applied it greatly grieved Him. They had truth – but the way they applied it resulted in distortions and heartache for those who tried to follow. The God they portrayed was unmerciful and unloving – the opposite of the God we serve.

QUESTION: The rigid and judgmental attitudes of the Pharisees grieved Jesus. What attitudes do you demonstrate that would also grieve Him?

QUESTION: When has God rebuked you for being rigid and judgmental in expressing your religious views? What did you do to change those tendencies?

QUESTION: Which of your friends demonstrate those attitudes? How would you be able to point out the error of their ways?

As a result, Jesus announced a series of woes in the form of prophetic cursing and judgment. A Biblical scholar said this, "Jesus is a mourner that God has hired to announce to His people that their religious system is dying." So, what were these Pharisees practicing? **1) HYPOCRISY.** Jesus criticized them saying, "Do not do what they do for they do not practice what they preach." They believed the right things – they just didn't live them. There is no pain like religious hypocrisy. If some people are walking away from the church and even God Himself because of the hypocrisy they see there, we are so sorry. **2) LEGALISM.** Jesus says some churches put heavy loads on people, but the leaders aren't willing to remove them. They take the Law and add rules or boundaries which become the heart of the Law itself. They are so restricting that the people cannot live up to them. We have to stop excusing these things in others, but also in ourselves.

QUESTION: When have you practiced hypocrisy and legalism in your family? What was the result?

QUESTION: Christopher Hitchens, a confirmed atheist said, "Religion poisons everything." If you agree with his philosophy, what caused you to feel that way?

APPLICATION

Those who are trying to dismantle our faith say the same thing about us. "Christians say one thing but live another." Generally, people don't set out to become hypocrites – they just end up there. Christianity is the only faith in the world that says we need to repent of doing good things with the wrong motives - we need to repent of our religion where judgment, pride and self-righteousness result. If we are followers of Jesus, we have a challenge. The Church does not have a good reputation right now. No one is looking at us and thinking – that is what God had in mind.

QUESTION: How can our truth be practiced in such a way that we avoid self-righteousness and create a culture that doesn't bring death but life?

Here is how hope begins to emerge: **Empathize** with others who hurt. **Show compassion.** **Change burdens** into freeing grace. **Spread the gospel** of love and salvation. We are the salt of the earth - we are carriers of hope and compassion. We are sent to put the life-giving, hope restoring and disruptive grace of Jesus on display at this moment in time. We have to convert religious burdens into life-giving freeing grace. We don't want to be thrown out and trampled underfoot, but to be servants of God who glorify His name every day of our lives.

QUESTION: What talents or skills has God blessed you with that would help you contribute to reconstructing the faith of others?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, discipline us when we are judgmental and self-righteous. Forgive us for criticizing others and excusing ourselves for doing the same things. Help us to unite our church in serving others with compassion and love. In Jesus' name. Amen

QUESTIONS

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