



UNIONTOWN
BIBLE CHURCH

Sermon Guide February 8: Matthew 23

What stood out to you most from the sermon? Why?

Key Takeaways:

1. Religion at its best is when God's love poured into us spills out to others. False religion is performance-based, focused on appearance, and burdensome.
2. Characteristics of the Religion Jesus Hates:
 1. Loves the spotlight more than serving in the shadows
 2. Makes salvation harder than Jesus did
 3. Makes excuses instead of owning error
 4. Busy with religious activities but unconcerned with justice, mercy, and faithfulness
 5. More concerned with image than integrity
 6. More aware of others' sins than our own
3. Jesus didn't come for good people—there are no good people. He came for those who recognize they're broken and run to Him for mercy.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Matthew 23:1-13 together. What strikes you most about Jesus' tone and approach with the Pharisees? Why do you think He was so direct?
2. In verse 4, Jesus says the Pharisees "tie up heavy loads" on people. What are some modern examples of how churches or Christians might do this today?
3. Jesus says in verse 11, "The greatest among you will be your servant." How does this contradict our culture's definition of greatness? How does it contradict religious culture?
4. Many people think they're Christians because they "vote Republican and don't drink light beer." What cultural markers or behaviors do we sometimes substitute for genuine faith?
5. Which of the characteristics of "the religion Jesus hates" resonated most with you personally? Why?

6. Just like the people Jesus was talking to we strain out gnats but gulp down camels. What are some "easy" religious activities we focus on while neglecting harder things like justice, mercy, and faithfulness?
7. Discuss the difference between tithing your tomatoes (easy, measurable religion) and showing mercy to difficult people (costly, real faith). Which comes more naturally to you? Why?
8. Read Matthew 23:37-39. After everything Jesus said about the Pharisees, His heart breaks for them. What does this reveal about Jesus' character? About His heart toward us when we fail?
9. Jesus didn't die for the cleaned-up version of you. He died for the real you. How does this truth change the way we approach God? The way we approach each other?
10. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to "clean the outside of the cup" while neglecting your heart (Matthew 23:25-26)?
11. The religion Jesus loves "constantly runs to Him for mercy." What would it look like for you to run to Jesus this week instead of performing for Him?
12. Who in your life needs to experience the mercy, justice, or faithfulness that should overflow from your relationship with Jesus? What's one practical way you can show that this week?

Practical Applications:

1. **SHADOW SERVICE:** Do one act of service this week that no one will know about except you and God. Don't post it, don't mention it, just serve.
2. **MERCY MISSION:** Identify someone in your life who is difficult, undeserving, or unable to repay you. Show them intentional mercy or kindness this week.
3. **HONEST INVENTORY:** Spend 30 minutes in prayer asking God to show you where you've been more concerned with image than integrity. Write down what He reveals and share it with one trusted person.
4. **JUSTICE ACTION:** Research one issue of injustice in your community. Take one concrete step to address it—volunteer, donate, advocate, or simply learn more.
5. **CONFESSION PRACTICE:** Instead of pointing out others' sins this week, practice confessing your own—to God and to someone you trust.