

# Isn't Religion Really About Controlling People?

*Reconsider, Pt. 3*

*Luke 19:41-48*

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# I. PRAYER

## II. INTRODUCTION

### a. Q&A Announcement

### b. This is week three of a sermon series we are doing called **RECONSIDER.**

- i. And I am going to be straight with you.
  - Our desire and our prayer is that during this season of dealing with a global pandemic where we have to livestream our church services (instead of gathering in person)...that there would be people who...
    1. Maybe don't believe in Jesus.
    2. Are wrestling with what they believe.
    3. Maybe people who have had bad experiences with the church in the past and are checking it out again now because they can do that online..
  - People who normally wouldn't come to church but are tuning in...and maybe are in a place in their life where they would be willing to reconsider what they believe about God and faith.
    1. Maybe this pandemic has gotten someone really anxious about life and what it all means.
    2. That maybe they would tune in...and hear the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ...and hear that they are loved and that their creator wants to be in close relationship with them.
    3. And they would surrender they lives to Jesus.



- Maybe you're one of those people.
  1. And if you are...I hope you'll hang with us for the next few minutes.
  2. Because if just one of you finds peace with God...then doing all of this was worth it.
  3. And we have been praying specifically for you.
- ii. **So, this sermon series is all about answering some common questions or assumptions that people might have about faith.**

- And maybe, just maybe, you'll reconsider what you believe about Jesus Christ.

**c. So, the first week, the question we asked was this:**

- i. **Isn't religion just a coping mechanism for weak people or people who go through a lot of suffering?**
  - And in that sermon we looked at some data around this question and also what the Bible has to say about it.
    1. So, if you missed it, you can find it on our podcast, our Youtube Channel, or Facebook Page.

**d. And then last week, our second week, we asked:**

- i. **Aren't we just temporary, material beings? We're just a clump of complex biological matter and that's it, right?**
  - Or, are we really made for a higher purpose?
  - Great question. And I encourage you to go listen to that sermon as well.



## **e. But this morning, here is the question we want to ask...**

- i. Isn't religion just about controlling people?
  - Isn't this just about manipulating people? Profiting off of people?
    1. Right, you get religious professionals like me jumping on stage and preaching to people how they should live their lives, what their morality should be, what is right and what is wrong, what their worldview would be.
    2. And there is this all powerful being in the sky who is watching your every move.
    3. And if you do everything that I say, this god will bless you, he will hear your prayers, he will comfort you.
    4. But if you do what is wrong, this god will curse you and punish you.
  - And now, we have these religious systems that have been built and practiced for millennia and people believe them.
    1. But really at the end of the day, it's a way to control people's behavior and for people like me to dictate what is right and what is wrong.
- ii. **Now, let me tell you where I got this question. The first person to pose this question to me was my neighbor.**
  - He doesn't believe in God and he said to me (in a very friendly conversation):
    1. "No offense to your line of work, but I think all religion is about is controlling people and society."



- And you know what my response was...what I told him....
    1. That question....is a completely fair question.
- iii. **Because let me be honest...**
- If I were someone who didn't believe in God.
    1. I obviously do believe in God. I believe Jesus is the Son of God. I believe the Bible is the exclusive source of truth about God.
  - But if I were someone who was an atheist or an agnostic...
    1. I think I would wrestle with this same question!
    2. Because history is riddled with examples of people using faith and religion to control people, to manipulate people, and to profit off of people.
    3. And they do it by pulling on people's heart strings and giving them spiritual sounding guilt trips.
- iv. **And I get it...I get it when people see a "very small" sample size of evangelicals absolutely drunk on their proximity to political power...to the point where they are willing to compromise their integrity and witness...**
- That non-Christians look on that and say...see...this is all about power and control for you...
  - You want to push your morality, your societal standards...even on people who don't believe the same things as you!



- v. When I see televangelists trying to profit off of a global pandemic by selling special healing towels or vials of water and non-sense like that...
  - I get it when people who don't believe in God say to themselves...why would I ever give in to this con-game.
- vi. Or when we look at history and see the wars that have been fought or violence that has been committed in the name of a religion or motivated by some sort of faith...
  - I get it when people say...see religion is all about controlling people...to the point where people will even shed blood to maintain that control...and I don't want any part of that.
- vii. For those of us that do believe in God and do believe in the Bible, we need to own that people have abused others in the name of faith...
  - People have used faith to control others.
  - To manipulate others.
  - To profit off of others.
  - And it ought to make us sad...

### **III. LUKE 19**

- a. **And this morning, I want us to look at a story about Jesus recorded in the Gospel of Luke.**
  - i. Because we are going to see how this very thing...how faith is used by people to abuse others...also made Jesus sad...and how he wanted to nothing to do with it either.



- ii. And my prayer is that all of us would see that there is a difference between the institutionalized religions of the world...and the Gospel of Jesus Christ...

## **b. Turn in your Bibles to Luke 19.**

- i. As I am sure many of you know, this Sunday is Palm Sunday. And if you didn't know that, many of our kiddos in the church just reminded you.
  1. Man I miss you kids. I can't wait to see you guys again...
- Which means that we are one week away from Easter and Palm Sunday officially kicks off what we call in the church Holy Week.
  1. This is the week where we remember and celebrate the events that lead up to and include the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Palm Sunday officially commemorates Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem during the week that he would be crucified.
  1. And as Jesus is riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, many of his disciples line the streets, put palm leaves and their cloaks on the ground, and shout praises to Jesus.
  2. It is this scene that is usually described like a triumphal entry...like a King riding into his land after a victory.
- Yet, it is a scene full of irony.
  1. Because many of these same people who are shouting praises at him will be shouting CRUCIFY HIM in just a few day's time.



2. Because one thing will be made clear during Jesus' final week in Jerusalem...that His mission from God did not align with what had become of the religion that dominated Jerusalem at that time.

- And so, our text this morning picks up right after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

**c. Read Luke 19:41-44.**

i. Here is what Jesus is saying...

- Jerusalem! Israel!
  1. You are my people.
  2. You are the people whom God chose to reveal Himself to!
  3. God sent the prophets to you!
  4. God told you that He would send His Son as the Messiah to save you and to establish God's Kingdom.
- And I am here! And you've missed me!
  1. You don't even recognize that I am the Messiah.
  2. You're blind to the time of your visitation.
- And, so, Jesus foretells what is going to happen about 40 years after this.
  1. When the Romans comes in under Titus in AD 70, surround the city, besiege and burn it to the ground.

ii. But the reason that Jesus is so deeply grieved when he sees the city is because the religion of that city, Jerusalem, had turned into something that is not described in this book.

- Sure, they used God's name. They read passages from this book. They claimed to follow the one true God.



1. But we have a picture here in Luke of that one true God, Jesus Christ, riding into the city, he looks over it, and he weeps because they are all deceived.
  2. They claimed to follow the one true God yet they couldn't even recognize Him when He was in their midst.
- The religion had become so institutionalized.
  - The leaders of the religion had begun to see their platform as an easy way to control people...
    1. To gain power...
    2. To manipulate people...
    3. To profit off of people...
    4. To push particular political agendas...
  - To the point, where they completely missed the visitation of their Messiah.
- iii. **If we continue for a few more verses in our text...**
- After Jesus rides into the city, he visits the temple...the central place of worship...
    1. And Jesus confronts a blatant example of how genuine, authentic worship of the one true God had been hijacked by people and turned into an abusive and manipulative religion.

**d. Read Luke 19:45-48**

- i. **So, let me explain to you what is going on...**
  - First of all, we need to understand the purpose of the Temple.
    1. If you've been tuning into our Wednesday night Bible study of the book of Haggai, we've been talking a lot about this.



2. But, you have to understand that we live in a fallen, sinful world. God and man are at odds with one another.
3. God is our creator and we have rejected Him as having any sort of place or leadership in our lives.
4. But God has always been on a mission to reconcile that relationship.
5. And so, early on in the Old Testament, God gave His people the Temple.
6. And the Temple was a place where God's presence could be with man.
7. However, because God is holy and humanity is sinful, we can't just be in God's presence.
8. There needs to be some sort of mediation between us and God.
9. And that is what the Temple was all about.
10. It was this place where God's people would perform certain acts of worship and they would offer sacrifices of atonement so that they could be close to the presence of God.
11. And the Old Testament gives us a lot of detailed instructions about Temple worship...
12. There was a Temple tax you had to pay so the Temple could operate and you had to bring certain animals, crops, and other resources to the temple to offer as a sacrifice.



- So, back to Jesus at the Temple. Let's all put on our entrepreneur hats on. Let's pretend that we could care less about religion or worshiping God but what we really cared about was making money. And all of the sudden...we have a GREAT business idea.
  1. This is what entrepreneurs do! They come up with great ways to monetize something that hasn't been monetized before!
  2. And so, what began to happen at the temple is people began to establish these businesses.
  3. People traveled from far away to worship at the Temple.
  4. They needed to change money to pay the temple tax.
  5. So, people established business where they began to profit off of people's need to change money.
  6. It was hard to travel with different kinds of animals and grains and crops to offer sacrifices.
  7. So, people began to establish businesses where you could buy these things.
  8. And over time, this marketplace was established outside of the Temple.
  9. And whenever you have a market established, it's important to increase demand of that market, right?
  10. So, do you think people were being manipulated into buying certain supplies to worship at the temple?
  11. Do you think there were some under-the-table-deals with priests and temple service workers to help increase everyone's bottom line?



12. We don't know for sure. The text doesn't say.

13. But we all know human nature. And we all know that whenever there is a market...there is manipulation and corruption present to increase demand and profits.

- And this is the kind of religious culture that surrounded the temple when Jesus showed up that day.

ii. **And what did Jesus begin to do.**

- Well, here in Luke's account it says that Jesus began to drive out all of the merchants.
  1. In other Gospel accounts, we see Jesus overturning tables, pouring out the coins of the money changers on the ground and snapping a bull whip.
  2. The kind of manipulation, abuse, and racketeering that had become commonplace at the Temple ticked Jesus off and was not shy in expressing that.

**e. See, we see in this account why religion and spirituality is such an easy way to exercise control over people or to manipulate people.**

- i. Whenever people have a legitimate, genuine, authentic need.
  - Not a fake need. Not a manufactured need. But a valid need.
  - It is a great opportunity to take advantage of them.



- ii. Think about this...we all have a need for unconditional love from parents, from friends...
  - And people use that need to control, manipulate, and abuse others all the time.
  - It's sheer evil.
  - But it is because it is an actual need.
  - Evil people didn't invent love to control people.
  - They hijack our need for love to control people.
- iii. See, the fact that people use religion and spirituality to abuse people isn't an argument that spirituality is just a human invention,
  - I actually think it is proof that we are spiritual people who have a spiritual need.
    1. That we are created by God and our souls need to be in relationship with God.
    2. But, we are at odds with God and we need to be reconciled with Him.
    3. And we need reconciliation with God.
- iv. We have a true spiritual need...
  - And evil, abusive people will use that need against others to control them, to manipulate them, and to profit off of them.
  - And Jesus hated it...just like you probably hate it and I hate it.
- f. **Which is why in our text this morning the religious establishment of the day saw Jesus as a problem and plotted to kill him.**
  - i. **Read v.47-48.**



- See, Jesus came to meet your actual spiritual need.
  1. Which means the true message of Jesus is never abusive, it's never controlling, it's never manipulative.
  2. Jesus does not coerce or manipulate us into worshipping Him.

**g. In fact, when you read the Bible, one of the things that is crystal clear is that our true Spiritual need is not a law...a list of rules of what we should be doing or not doing!**

- Our true Spiritual need is not finding the right rituals or traditions to perform so God will be happy with us.
  - Our true Spiritual need is not that we need to be controlled, stifled, suppressed...
- i. **Actually, what the Bible says and what Jesus says is our true spiritual need is that we need to be set free to be who we are without any hindrance.**
- And you cannot fully be who you are, you cannot fully live out the purpose that you have, you cannot fully embrace joy and peace in this life if you are at odds with your creator.
    1. God is the one who created you. And gave you the personality you have. And laid the foundation for the skills and abilities and passions that you have.
    2. God didn't give those to you so that you might be stifled and suppressed.
    3. No, God gave you those because you bear His image and His desire is that you would live your life abundantly according to His purpose for you.



4. But you cannot fully be you if you are alienated from God.

## **h. And the difference between Jesus and controlling, abusive religion is Jesus came because He actually loves you and laid his life down for you.**

- i. While controlling, abusive religion is not interested in laying anything down for you.
  - It is only interested in taking things from you.
  - It is only interested in gaining followers so that their platform and their access to power and influence can increase.
    1. And there are many people out there who preach passages from this book and claim to be representing Jesus...
    2. And they are nothing but controlling, abusive religion.
- ii. Just listen to how Jesus describes the difference...
  - **John 10:7b-15 (NLT).**
    1. *"...I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. <sup>10</sup> The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. <sup>11</sup> "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> A hired hand will run when he sees a*



wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock.

<sup>13</sup> The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, <sup>15</sup> just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep.

## **i. Friends, our spiritual lead is not that we need a law.**

### **i. We have hearts that reject God.**

- We don't need a law. We don't need do's and don't's. Those things cannot change our heart.
- We need mercy from God for our sin and we need a new heart that loves God.

### **ii. And when Jesus says that He is the good shepherd who will lead us to rich and satisfying life...He is saying that He will be the one who will provide that mercy from God and that new heart that loves God.**

- And he does that through laying His own life down for you and for me.
- When Jesus hung on that cross, He took on Himself all of our sin and God rained down mercy on us.
  1. Making a way that we could now be reconciled to God.
  2. Not through temple sacrifices.
  3. Not through rituals.
  4. But now through Jesus.



- But we not only get the mercy of God, but God also begins a process of transformation in our hearts.
  1. Where we begin to love God and His ways.
  2. Where we see that His Word brings us life.
  3. Where we want to follow and surrender to Him in everything.
- And the reason why Jesus wept as He looked over Jerusalem was because God's mercy was available to them and they were rejecting it.
  1. And true freedom and life was near yet they were opting for cold, dead, manipulative religion.

### iii. **Is that going to be your story?**

- Are you going to be one who has heard the good news of the Gospel, yet reject it because you were not willing to reconsider the reasons why you have decided to not believe in God?
  1. Because today, God's mercy is available to you.
  2. Transformation in your heart, peace, joy, true freedom to be who God created you to be...is available to you.
- Here's my question, will you reconsider Jesus?
  1. Will you pray to Him right now and ask Him to reveal Himself to you.
  2. Ask Him for His mercy and see what he begins to do in your life.
  3. And we as a church want to make ourselves available to help you reconsider Jesus.



4. All you need to do is go to our website – click the “Connect With Us” button – and let us know how we can serve you.
5. We have been praying specifically for you, already.

**j. But Grace Hill Church, there are two things from this I want to encourage you with today.**

- i. First, we serve a God who promises us rich, satisfying life.
  - That does not mean the absence of suffering and hard circumstances.
  - But it does mean that he wants to shepherd our souls towards joy and peace in the midst of the storm all around us.
- ii. If that joy and peace has been absent in your soul, you need to avail yourself to the ministry of the Body of Christ.
  - God never designed us to be able to do anything alone, really.
  - We need each other.
  - You have a Savior that has laid His life down for you and you have a church family who will lay their life down for you as well to minister to your soul.

**k. And let us also let that be a challenge for us today, church.**

- i. What our world needs today, what our brothers and sisters in Christ need today, is not behavior control or guilt trips.
  - What our world needs and what we all need is the Gospel.
    1. The ministry and the care of the Good Shepherd.



- And the way that we the church point people to the Good Shepherd is by laying our lives down for others as Christ has laid down His life for us.
  1. The world doesn't need to see any more examples of selfish religion.
  2. The world needs to see examples of the church loving people like Jesus loved people.
- ii. **And so, if you are made aware of someone - someone in the church who is suffering, who is anxious, who is struggling with peace and joy - a neighbor - a co-worker....**
  - How will you lay your life down for them?
  - How will you be a consistent presence of encouragement in their life?
    1. Not a text message or two.
    2. But a shepherd leading them to where true life and peace is found.

## **I. Our world has seen enough of cold, dead religion.**

- i. **But Jesus came to lay His life down so that we may have true life.**
  - And Grace Hill, we are followers of Jesus.
  - Let's follow Him.
  - Let's show our world the character, the glory, and the mercy of the One, True God...our Creator.

## **IV. PRAY**

