

**Sermon Series: The Hard Sayings of Jesus**

**Sermon Title: Religion Vs. Relationship**

**Sermon Text: Matthew 15:1-20**

Last week I/Jesus said some hard things that disturbed the soil of many, **but if the result was a tending to your soil, then mission accomplished.**

But I want to be clear, the “good soil” isn’t simply defined by the 28% who have been in worship more than me, or the 30% in “growth groups”, or the 34% serving in “ministries.” Jesus never defined “good soil” in that way!

**Jesus defined good soil as that which produces good fruit!** What is good fruit?

- More people in worship, or more worship in people?
- More people getting into the Bible, or more Bible getting into our people?
- More religious activity, or more of God’s transformative activity in us?

Worship attendance, Bible Study, & Service do not produce good fruit in our lives, **it’s the work of Christ, & the power of His Spirit that brings the harvest**

**Some of the hardest soil to till up is the soil of those who call themselves religious!** Our religious resumes can be a hindrance to real growth & faith!

Consider **the Pharisees...** They were... **Matthew 15:1-20**

**“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”**

- There is difference between speaking/singing words of worship out of our mouths and speaking/singing them from out of our hearts!
- There is a difference between being “religious” & being in “relationship” with Jesus Christ!
- There is a difference between teaching/following the commandments of God & teaching/following the commandments of men!

For the Pharisees, “religious activity” became their focus, rather than their religious activities focusing their hearts on the One worthy of their worship!

The Pharisees looked like good soil... good fruit... but looks can be deceiving! They excelled at being religious, but that’s not what God wants from us!

**The same was true for God’s people Israel in the Old Testament...**

- **Vs. 8-9** are the words of the OT prophet Isaiah who called out God’s people for their hypocrisy & prophesied the fall of Jerusalem in 722B.C.

These words had application in Isaiah’s day, but Jesus uses them to describe the current reality of the hypocrisy in His day as well!

**The same was true in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Europe, with the Roman Catholic Church.** The Church had elevated their traditions, and their own authority, over what the Bible clearly teaches!

And on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his “95 theses” to the church door in Wittenberg raising the same complaints that Isaiah, and Jesus, voiced all those years before – **vs. 8-9!**

Is “the Church” today any different? **How often do we make man-made religion our god, at the expense of truly following Christ & worshipping Him?**

I know of churches where the “commandments of men” are the emphasis:

- Where you can’t use any other translation of the Bible b/c it’s not the...
- Where you can’t wear shorts because that is not pleasing to God!
- Where you can’t partake in communion if you are not a member of the...
- Where infant baptism is not recognized & membership forbidden until...
- Where your worship is viewed as less than if you don’t speak in tongues.
- Where a 2<sup>nd</sup> baptism is differentiated from the 1<sup>st</sup> & held in higher regard
- Where if you dance/play cards/go to the movies, you’ll be asked to leave

Why do we let the “commands of men”, & religion, trump the truth of God found in Scripture alone? **Sola Scriptura is/should be our foundation of faith**

We don’t emphasize “Worship”, “Growth Groups”, “Service”, & “Faith-Sharing” here at BRC because we are trying to create religious people, **we emphasize them because we believe they help us connect with Jesus!**

Our religious activities are for the purpose of either pointing us to Jesus, or providing us with opportunities to live out our relationship with Jesus in ways that bring Him honor and glory in this life!

**If our focus is ever on ourselves, & what we do, rather than on Jesus & what He has done/is doing/will do, then we too need to be reminded of vs. 8-9.**

May we not only sing the words from the song “Heart of Worship”, but may they be an overflow of our transformed/ing hearts –

*“I’ll bring you more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required. You search much deeper within, through the way things appear. You’re looking into my heart...” “I’m coming back to the heart of worship, and it’s all about You, it’s all about you Jesus. I’m sorry Lord for the thing I’ve made it, because it’s all about You, it’s all about You Jesus!”*

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