

**GIVE ME 15 MINUTES**

**GIVE ME 15 MINUTES TO...**

**July 3/4** ... to explain who Jesus is

**July 10/11** ... to tell you why I'm not religious

**July 17/18** ... to explore why sad things happen to good people

**July 24/25** ... to explain that you are more loved than you dare to hope

**BATHURST DIOCESE**  
Anglican Church of Australia

**LEADERS:** choose some, but not all of the following questions. Email me with any questions. Mark.

1. Was there anything *new* for you from the message? Anything that needs clarification?
2. How was the term 'religion' used in the sermon?

**Read Matthew 23:1-12**

**Religion = burden - v4**

3. v4 - what were the burdens the religious leaders were laying on people's shoulders?
4. In what ways does religion burden people today? Do you know of people burdened this way?
5. Read Matthew 11:28-30 and discuss how Jesus releases us from that burden.

**Religion = outward show - vv5-7**

6. What is it about the outward show and pompous ceremony the religious leaders loved so much? Is this a danger for some clergy (and lay people) today?
7. See Jesus' damning indictment in vv22 and 25. How is it that people can be so enthralled by pedantic rule keeping, yet care nothing for justice, mercy, faithfulness, greed and self-indulgence?
8. Read 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Galatians 5:22-23. Jesus, by contrast is not interested in outward show, but \_\_\_\_\_ . How might we be open to the Holy Spirit's work of transformation within us?

**Religion = what you do**

9. Comment on the view of God represented by statements a friend of Mark's once made: "She's baptised - she's in now!" and "I've been to church enough at school to last a lifetime!"
10. Why do so many people think it's all about what we D-O?
11. Read Titus 3:4-5. How is what Jesus as D-O-N-E for us sufficient to reconcile us to God?

**Religion = rebellion**

12. Read Matthew 23:37. Jesus longed to gather the religious leaders into a relationship with him whereby he would love and protect them, but they *were not willing*. In the end, all religion is rebellion against God's revealed ways. By contrast, discuss the nature of surrender to the Lord Jesus to which we're invited. Describe the difference between religion and real relationship with God in a nutshell.
13. In Mark's sermon, he warned of the ways that even Christians can slip into religious ways of thinking and behaving (refer to the end of his message). How are these to be avoided?

*Take some time to thank God for the burden he releases us from; for the inner work of the Holy Spirit transforming us into the likeness of Jesus; and for the fact that Jesus has DONE all that is needed to reconcile us to the Father. Ask that more and more people across in our parish may see the difference between religion and relationship with the Lord Jesus!*

**Preaching Christ....  
...by the power of the Holy Spirit  
...and the authority of the Word of God**

**Date:** 11 July 2021  
**Services:** *Across the Diocese*  
**Series:** Give me 15 minutes...  
**Title:** ...to tell you who why I'm not religious.  
**Passage:** Matthew 23  
**Aim:** To show that religion is ultimately a human construct grounded in rebellion against God... from which Jesus has come to wonderfully release us.

**Outline:**

1. Religion = burden (vs release)
2. Religion = outward show (vs inner transformation)
3. Religion = what you DO (vs what has been DONE)
4. Religion = rebellion (vs surrender)

**READING: MATTHEW 23:1-6; 13; 25-28**

**23** Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: <sup>2</sup>“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. <sup>3</sup>So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. <sup>4</sup>They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

<sup>5</sup>“Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries<sup>[a]</sup> wide and the tassels on their garments long; <sup>6</sup>they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; <sup>7</sup>they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.

<sup>13</sup>“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. <sup>[14]</sup> <sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>25</sup>“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup>Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

<sup>27</sup>“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. <sup>28</sup>In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

- I have **15 minutes** to tell you why I'm not religious... and I could probably easily take **½ hour** or **more!**
- The most common reply I hear when introducing myself to people and they discover in conversation I'm a **minister** is: “Well, **I'm not very religious!**”
- I always answer (to their surprise), “**No, nor am I!**”
- **Religion** is humankind’s way of trying to connect with God and reach eternity... all by themselves... their own way!
- It’s about **rules** and **regulations**
- It’s about **rituals** and **regalia**
- It’s about **duty** and **performance**
- ...it’s **demanding**, it’s **exacting**... and it weighs people **down** and ties people **up**...
- ...and Jesus’ **harshest** words were reserved for the **religious people – religious leaders** of his day. //
- Let’s explore some of what Jesus had to say to the religious leaders in Matthew 23... //

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- Tension has been building between **Jesus** and the **religious officials**
- There has been some significant **toing** and **froing** between them on **weighty issues** and Jesus has called them **out** and **exposed** some of their **folly**
- But **now** in Matt 23 he's not going to hold **back**... / he really lets them **have** it... and we've only read some of the chapter this morning but I hope you'll read it all for yourself!
- First, he points out that:

**1. RELIGION = BURDEN**

- v4 – talking about the religious leaders Jesus says *they tie up heavy loads and put them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them...*
- Jesus is no doubt referring to the man-made rules the teachers of the law added to God's requirements just to make sure they didn't get **close** to breaking the Old Testament laws
- In modern day Judaism this still happens... in some Jewish homes... all lights blazing all Friday night – all night – because to turn the light off would be to work on the Sabbath.... Or where they have to ask a neighbour to call a doctor on Saturday if needed because to do so themselves would be to work.
- This is a beautiful view on the Southern Tablelands in NSW near a little village called Bundanoon.
- Over the years, the fence has been moved further and further back from the edge to prevent people getting close to the edge
- This is what the religious leaders of Jesus' day did... they burdened people with **more and more rules** and **regulations** and **MORE rules** and **regulations** so that you spent your entire life making sure you **kept** the rules and didn't come close to breaking the **rules**
- But this is typical of **all** religion... religion **burdens** people... weighs them **down**... **do this, don't do this**... undergo this **ritual** at this **particular time**... in this **particular way**... because if you **don't**... well – you're not in – not part of the **club**! You can't **join** the **party**!
- This is why I'm not **religious**... !

**2. RELIGION = OUTWARD SHOW**

- Have a look with me at v5 – *Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.*
- It's all about **show**!
- **Attention... recognition... flattery... praise... the honour of others... rising up the ladder of appointments...**
- The joy in bearing the **name** which meant **status** and **position** - **rabbi, teacher... master.** //
- A phylactery is a box containing excerpts of the law... the bigger the **box** or the **strap** by which the box is **held**... the more **attention** you **commanded**...
- All about drawing attention to **themselves**!
- This is what happens with **religion** – not only amongst those in **leadership**
- Being **seen** to be doing something **good** becomes more important than / doing something **good**! //
- Later on in this chapter (v23) he goes on to say that they give a tenth of all their spices they grow in their garden – implication – so they can be **seen** to be doing the right thing – but **neglect** the more **important** matters of **justice, mercy and faithfulness**.. //

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- Or they make sure they make sure they've ceremonially cleansed their **dishes**... but inside their **heart** – they are full of **greed and self-indulgence!**
  - **OUTWARD SHOW!!**
  - Jesus goes on to say here that he's on about something completely **opposite**.
  - He turns all that on its head when he says (see v11) *the **greatest among you will be your servant... for whoever **exalts themselves will be humbled** and whoever **humbles themselves will be exalted.** //***
  - Religious people who are motivated by the **recognition** they **receive** from **others**... will in the end be **humbled**.
  - But you see this leads us to **another** reason I'm not religious...
- 3. RELIGION = WHAT YOU DO**
- ... it's about your **performance**
  - Following the **rules and regulations**
  - **Not** breaking the **laws**
  - Taking part in the **rituals**
  - **Scoring** the **points**
  - **Marking** up the **tally**
  - ...With the hope that in the end you've done **enough**...
  - ...**given** enough; **prayed** enough; turned up enough to **church**; amassed sufficient **good works**; haven't done anything **wrong** – at least anything **major** wrong!
  - It's predicated on and driven by **fear**... **fear** that you **won't make** it... fear you won't be **good enough**; fear you won't be **accepted** or **acceptable**..
  - So you keep on striving hard to give yourself the **best possible chance**...
  - It's typified by a friend's comment at a baptism Susan and I attended... **two** things the **dad** at the baptism said (1) about his little girls' baptism – well – she's **IN** now!  
(2) I've been to church enough times at **school** to last a **life time**.....
  - In other words... as far as **he** was concerned – the **ritual** of **baptism** was enough to ensure his little girl was '**in**' and on **his** understanding there is a given number of times one must go to church – I'm not sure what that number was – but as he'd already **exceeded** that number he didn't have to go any **more**...! **perfect!! //**
  - What sort of **sick** view of God is that....?
  - On **that** view God is simply a kind of **disinterested clerk**... that all he needs to do is tick sufficient **boxes** and... you're **in**...! //
  - That's **religion** for you
  - **That's** what it's about and **that's** how it **works** and **that's** why I am **not** religious. //
  - Which brings me finally to that fact that in the end
- 4. RELIGION IS REBELLION**
- Yes... in the end... **religion** is **rebellion** against God
  - Because if you're weighed down by religion's **demands**
  - ... if you're more concerned about what people **see** than about what's going on in the **heart**

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- If you're concerned about your **performance** and **point-scoring** with God...
- ...then you have **no idea what** God is **on about!**
- ...you haven't been **listening** to him
- ... you've **made up** a form of relating to him that **doesn't** come from **him**
- Your focus is on **you** not **him!**
- ...you are **rebellious against** what he has made clear in the **Bible!**
- You've **missed** or **neglected** or **rejected** outright his will for you and his **work** on your **behalf** through the **Lord Jesus...**
- So let me go back to those four points and show you God's beautiful ways... which are about as **opposite** to the ways of **religion** as you can **imagine...**
- For what he wants for us is

**1. NOT BURDEN BUT RELIEF**

- Jesus said (Matthew 11:28-30): *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*
- Jesus wants to **free** you and **release** you from the **burden** of **sin** and the **weight** of **performance**
- **Rest for souls** is what he wants...
- There's a great scene in the film called "The Mission" where the main figure has been carrying a burden of guilt and sin up a mountain side... suddenly it's cut away and he's wondrously **freed...**
- ...it's a **metaphor** and **illustration** of our burden of **guilt** and **sin** and the very **need to perform**, being **cut away** by **Jesus...**
- **Jesus** took that burden on the **cross** when he **died** for you and me...
- And so he comes not to **burden** us but to **relieve** us..
- And he's on about

**2. NOT OUTWARD SHOW BUT INNER TRANSFORMATION**

- 2 Corinthians 3:18 *And we all, [ ]... are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit*
- Yes what people see on the outside **WILL** change –**RADICALLY** change... but not because of our **supreme moral effort** – but because of the work of God's Holy **Spirit** – changing you from the **inside, / out!**
- When we come into relationship with God, he enters our life by His **Spirit** and begins to go to **work**, to make us his **own**.
- To challenge **this** part of our life – and **that** part – and give us both the **desire** and **power** to **change...**
- To change our **bitterness** into **compassion...** our **selfishness** into **generosity...** our **desire** to promote and draw attention to **ourselves** to a desire to **promote** and **draw attention** to the **Lord Jesus...**
- The outcome of the Holy Spirit's work is described in Paul's letter to the Galatians as: *love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.*
- **Inner** transformation... **that's** what real relationship with God brings...
- Because it's

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**3. NOT ALL ABOUT WHAT YOU DO... IT'S ABOUT WHAT JESUS HAS DONE**

- Titus 3:4-5 - *when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.*
- Not because of what **WE** have done but because of what **HE** has done!
- Our relationship with God is not based on what we **DO** but what he has **DONE**
- RELIGION can be spelt **D-O**
- RELATIONSHIP – true Christianity - can be spelt **D-O-N-E**...
- Because it's all about what he has so wonderfully **DONE** for us... in the gift of his Son...
- **He** invites us
- **He** initiates the relationship
- **He** reveals himself
- **He** has dealt with our sin by which our relationship was cut off
- **He** wipes the slate clean
- **He** gives us the gift of eternal life
- **He** gives us his Holy Spirit to transform us into his likeness...
- **It's all his** work... for **our** benefit – and for **his** glory. //
- And that leaves us finally with that glorious fact that in contrast with **religion** which is **rebellion**

**4. CHRISTIANITY IS ALL ABOUT SURRENDER**

- .... About **surrender** of your **life**
- Surrender of your **autonomy**
- Surrender of you running your **own** life...
- Surrender into the **loving arms** of a **heavenly Father** and **King of Kings**...
- It's about realising and admitting you've been doing your **own** thing your **own** way...
- And handing yourself over to **his** thing // **his** way... in relationship with him...

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- So let me finish with **two challenges**
- Have you **surrendered** yet?
- Maybe you've never seen so clearly the difference between **religion** and the **unique nature** of the **Christian faith** so clearly put

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- Maybe you had **rejected religion** outright for the same reasons **I have**... it's a **burden**... its **outward show**... it's **performance mentality**... it's hypocritical and you've wanted **nothing** to do with it... I get that... **I'm with you!** //
- Or maybe you've been **caught up** in religion...
- Maybe you've **felt** the **burden**... you've been caught up in the demands of **keeping up appearances** in the **outward show** and feeling if you can ever **DO** enough! //
- For people in **both** positions... **today's the day... today's the day...**
- If you've realised for the **first** time what Christianity is **actually** all about... **today's** the day to embrace the **forgiveness** and **life** on offer through Jesus Christ – to reject religion and come into relationship.
- Or if you've been caught up yourself in the **burden** of **religion**, in some sort of expression of the Christian faith which doesn't match what the Bible is talking about?... **today's** the day to reject that and to embrace what **Jesus** has **done** / and feel the **relief** of the **burden** you've been **carrying**...
- And there are times I forget it's about what has been **done** for me and think it's up to me to **DO DO DO!**
- We must not allow ourselves to slip **back** into those ways...!
- ...but to look to **Jesus**... our **Saviour**... who has **released** us from this burden... and who **transforms** us by his **Spirit** because he has **DONE** all that is needed to bring us to **himself**...!