

Group Leader Guide

What Would Jesus Say – part 2 “to the Religious”

Sermon Recap

What if your faith has become nothing more than an empty shell—appearing alive on the outside while dead within? Pastor Chris confronts this uncomfortable reality using Jesus' harsh words to the Pharisees, revealing five warning signs you might only have religion instead of relationship. Like specimens preserved in formaldehyde that look alive but aren't, many Christians today focus on outward appearance over inner purity, rituals over relationship, and being seen over serving God. Chris challenges us to examine whether we've drifted from our first love with Jesus into mere religious routine.

Ice Breaker

If you could instantly become an expert at any hobby in the world, what would it be and why?

Discussion Questions

1. What from the sermon stood out to you? How were you challenged, motivated, or convicted from what you heard?
2. Pastor Chris used the analogy of specimens preserved in formaldehyde to describe some churches and Christians today. What does it mean to appear 'alive' on the outside but be 'dead' on the inside spiritually?
 - a. Pastor Chris explained that formaldehyde keeps lifeless organisms looking alive for years, just like some churches and Christians appear alive outwardly but are spiritually dead inside. This was Jesus's main concern with the Pharisees.
 - b. Think about your own spiritual life - are there areas where you might be going through the motions of faith without real heart connection to God? What would it look like to have genuine spiritual life in those areas?
3. Jesus said in Luke 11:39, 'Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.' How can we tell the difference between caring about our outward appearance versus our inner character?
 - a. The Pharisees were obsessed with looking religious through ceremonies like ritual hand-washing, but Jesus pointed out their hearts were corrupt. Pastor Chris emphasized that God looks at the heart, not outward appearance.
 - b. Pastor Chris said your character is 'who you are when no one is looking.' What does your behavior look like when you're alone or when others aren't watching? How can you focus more on developing inner character?
4. What's the difference between participating in religious rituals and having a genuine relationship with God? Can rituals ever become harmful to our faith?

- a. Pastor Chris explained that the Pharisees were so focused on religious acts like tithing even their garden herbs that they forgot about justice and love. He warned that even good things like giving or prayer can become empty rituals.
 - b. Look at your own spiritual practices (prayer, church attendance, Bible reading, etc.). Are these helping you grow closer to God, or have any of them become routine habits without heart? How can you bring fresh life to them?
5. Pastor Chris mentioned that some people burden others with rigid rules that aren't found in Scripture, calling this 'legalism.' How can we balance following biblical principles with avoiding unnecessary rules that push people away from God?
 - a. Jesus criticized the legal experts for loading people down with burdens they couldn't carry. Pastor Chris explained that some churches create rules about clothing, music, and other issues that aren't clearly addressed in the Bible, making faith about rule-following rather than love.
 - b. Have you ever experienced or witnessed legalism that made faith feel burdensome? How can you show grace to others while still living according to biblical values?
6. Pastor Chris compared losing your 'first love' with Jesus to what happens in marriage when couples stop making time for each other. What are some practical ways to maintain intimacy and passion in your relationship with God?
 - a. Using Revelation 2:4 about the church in Ephesus forsaking their first love, Pastor Chris explained that just like married couples can drift apart when they stop dating and spending quality time together, we can drift from Jesus when we get caught up in religious activity without relationship.
 - b. Think back to when your faith felt most alive and passionate. What were you doing differently then? What specific steps could you take this week to 'remember, repent, and return' to those practices that drew you closer to Jesus?

Prayer

- Begin by asking everyone for their prayer requests.
- Ask God for help in distinguishing between true faith and mere religious rituals in our lives.
- Pray for strength to maintain an intimate relationship with God beyond outward appearances.
- Seek guidance for being more just and loving in day-to-day interactions.