



Putting Religion in Its Place

John 1:14; Mark 2:24, 27; Isaiah 1:11-17; Matthew 22:37-40

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The Bottom Line: Jesus came to put religion in its place.

Review:

One of the unique things Christians believe is *God became one of us*.

John, an eyewitness, who believed and then disbelieved ... then wasn't sure what he believed ... then was exiled by Emperor Domitian to Patmos, where he had a long time to think about what he believed.

John was banished for what he believed because of what he saw.

John 1:14 (NASB), "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [pitched his tent] among us ..."

Jesus came as one of us, but he was treated as **less** than one of us. Why did he become one of us?

The Sunday school answer is he came to die for us, but there's more to it. The first reason (we covered in weeks one and two) was to **communicate** and **demonstrate** what God is like.

Last week, we discovered another reason, modeled more than taught: Jesus came to **elevate** the **dignity** of the **individual**.

This brings us to a third, disturbing, liberating reason: Jesus came to put religion in its place.

Religion has its place.

Systematic theology, principles to live by, and ethical and moral boundaries are all wonderful tools religion provides. We want answers for life's mysteries, and religion offers answers.

Religion has its place, but ...

Jesus taught us – Religion is never supposed to be in *first* place.

He knows when religion takes **first** place, it begins flexing its muscles at the expense of **mercy**. It begins hurting people and lording over others.

Example: Pope Urban II's speech on November 27, 1095

The other problem with religion taking first place is religion *collapses* under the weight of the real world.

Religion is about answers, explanations, systems, order, and predictability, but life is not. Real life is unsystematic, inconsistent, random, and most of the time, messy.

When religion is in first place ...

Leaders become self-righteous.

Followers become hypocrites.

But, Jesus came to put religion in its place.

Jesus consistently prioritized *people* over his own religion, customs, and traditions.

Mark 2:24, 27 (NIV84), "The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, **why** are they doing what is **unlawful** on the **Sabbath**.' ... 'The **Sabbath** was made for **man**, not **man** for the Sabbath.'"

Isaiah 1:11, 13, 15, 17 (NIV84), "'The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me?' says the LORD. 'I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no **pleasure** in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. ... Stop bringing me **meaningless** offerings! Your incense is **detestable** to me. ... When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I will not **listen**. ... Learn to do **right**; seek **justice**. Encourage the **oppressed**. Defend the cause of the **fatherless**; plead the case of the **widow**.'"

As long as you are mistreating people, I'm not interested in your religion.

Matthew 22:37-40, "Jesus replied, '**Love** the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second **is like it**, 'Love your **neighbor** as **yourself**.' **All** the Law and the Prophets **hang** on these two commandments.'"

When you don't know what to do, do what love requires of you.

When in doubt, help a brother out.

Religion has a place: *second* place.

Jesus demonstrated his **commitment** to God through his **love** for people.

Conclusion:

Views come and go, even interpretation of Scripture changes. *People* – that's different.

That's not a very religions thing to say. It doesn't even sound like a Christian thing, but perhaps it's the most Christian thing:

- Jesus didn't die for **precept** and **principles**. Jesus died for **people**.
- Jesus didn't die for the **law**. Jesus died for the **lawless**.
- Jesus didn't die for a set of **rules**. Jesus died for the **rule breakers**.
- Jesus didn't even die for **sin**. Jesus died for the **sinners**.
- Jesus didn't die for a **view**. Jesus died for **you**.

Jesus came to put religion in its place: second place. Behind you, me, the person on your right, the person on your left, physically, politically, and ideologically.

You can know with certainty that you are more important than God's view of religion because ***God's view of you was defined by his Son's view from a blood-stained Roman cross.***

Why did God become one of us? To put religion in its place. Second place. Right behind you.

NEXT STEPS:

- Memorize: Matthew 22:37-40**
- Read the Gospels**
- Answer, "What do we learn about the Father from the Son?"**
- Pray Daily: What does love require of me?**
- Join Us Next Week for Christmas Sunday**