

INTRODUCTION

Since February we've been walking slowly through the Gospel According to Matthew and pondering every Parable and Miracle of Jesus. Jesus employed an amazing array of metaphors and word pictures. In this message we will talk about "You might be religious but lost if you"

A company was considering a new pension plan in which the employees would contribute an amount and the company would match it. The only stipulation was the plan required 100% employee participation. Everyone signed on except for Sam. Sam's boss and the other employees cajoled Sam to sign up but he refused. He said he didn't think the plan would ever pay off. Finally on the day of the deadline, Sam's boss called him into his office and said, "Sam, here's the contract and here's a pen. I want you to sign the papers. If you don't you're fired—RIGHT NOW!" Sam took the pen and signed the contract. His boss said, "Sam, would you mind telling me why you didn't sign earlier?" Sam said, "Well, sir, nobody ever explained it to me as clearly as you did."

In these verses Jesus warns us very clearly about the danger of being religious but lost. He sometimes spoke in parables that were hard to understand, but in this text there are no hidden meanings.

If the title of this message reminds you of something, yes I did model it after Jeff Foxworthy's famous sayings about how to know if you're a redneck. He has over 500 in his collection, and here are four of my favorites:

- 1) You might be a redneck if you ever cut your grass and found a car.
- 2) You might be a redneck if you think the stock market has a fence around it.
- 3) You might be a redneck if there are more than five old McDonald's sacks in your car.
- 4) You might be a redneck if you had to remove a toothpick for your wedding pictures!

That's funny, but Jesus is talking about something that's not funny—and is much worse than being a redneck—and that's being religious but lost. These verses contain three strong warnings based upon three word pictures: Wolves, fruit and a final exam (judgement)

Matthew 7:15-23. "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

I'd like to introduce a new word in this message. When you need a word and can't find a word, you can make up a word. Each year about 200-300 new words are added to the English language.

For instance, in 2008 the word "swipeout" became an official word. A swipeout is when you have swiped your credit card so much the magnetic strip no longer works. Well, my new word is a combination of the words "Religious" and "Lost." It's "ReligiLOSTity." Some people aren't interested in avoiding hell and going to heaven because they don't even believe in heaven or hell—they're lost. But some people are religious and *think* they will go to heaven, but they don't know they're lost. They are suffering from what I'm calling religilostity.

Religion is man's attempt to reach up to God through rituals, rules, and self-righteousness. Whereas true Christianity is God reaching down to hopeless men and women and offering them a gift of a relationship with Him. The Bible *never* invites us to be religious. Our English word "religion" comes from two Latin words, "*re*" which means to repeat and "*ligere*" which means "to tie or to bind." We get our word "ligament" from *ligere*—ligaments tie your muscles to your bones. A religion is something that binds you and ties you down again and again.

I tend to agree with the great American writer Samuel Langhorne Clemens, whose pen name was Mark Twain: Man is the Religious Animal. He is the only Religious Animal. He is the only animal that has the True Religion—several of them. He is the only animal that loves his neighbor as himself and cuts his throat if his theology isn't straight. He has made a graveyard of the globe in trying his honest best to smooth his brother's path to happiness and heaven.

He was right. Religion was responsible for all the deaths during the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the bloodshed in Northern Ireland, the 9/11 attack on America, and it is in the name of religion that children are being slaughtered in the Darfur region of the Sudan. Religion kills but Jesus said, "I've come that you might have LIFE and live it to the fullest!" Instead of religion, the Bible teaches that we can have a living relationship with God. There is an eternity of difference between religion and a relationship.

Are you a victim of religilostity? With apologies to Jeff Foxworthy, let's examine three ways to know if you're religious but lost. The first word picture Jesus employed was of wolves. Jeff Foxworthy says, If you think the last words of the national anthem are, 'Start your engines' ... you might be a redneck. But the Bible says:

(1) If you act nice around some people but on the inside you're mean and vicious...you might be religious but lost

Jesus said, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." Jesus didn't invent the wolf-in-sheep's-clothing metaphor. It had been around for many centuries in many cultures. One of Aesop's fables tells about a crafty wolf who finds the carcass of a lamb. Intending to sneak into the flock and snatch his own lamb for dinner, the wolf covers himself with the lamb's wool. But in the fable, as the wolf is sneaking toward the flock he doesn't see a shepherd approaching the flock to kill a lamb for dinner. In the fading light the shepherd mistakes the wolf for a lamb and kills it. The fable carries its own warning.

Although the picture wasn't new, Jesus applied it in a spiritual sense. He warned of some people who appear as docile as a lambs, but inwardly are as vicious as a marauding wolf. Jesus

criticized religious people who appeared to be outwardly good, but were inwardly unclean. He told the religious Pharisees they were like cups that were washed on the outside, but dirty on the inside, where it really matters. He said they were like whitewashed tombs—shiny and white on the outside, but inwardly full of rotteness and decay. As in the time of Jesus, there are people today who are more interested in appearing to be outwardly righteous than about inward purity. These are wolves in sheep's clothing.

This warning applies to all religious people who are fakes, but the specific application is a warning against false prophets—people who attack God's flock. Paul warned the pastors in the Ephesus area that these kinds of people would infiltrate churches. He said, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them." (Acts 20:29-30)

I'm reluctant to criticize other preachers, but one of my chief jobs as an undershepherd is to protect the flock God has entrusted to me. For this reason, I need to warn you that there are many false prophets in our world today. Jim Jones, who led his followers to commit mass suicide in Guyana, was a perfect example, but you only have to turn on your television to find others. With a spirit of humility, I believe Benny Hinn is just such a false prophet. The Bible says there are two ways to spot a false prophet a smile away. First, if they prophesy that something is going to happen and it doesn't, then they are not a prophet of God. The second sign is if they demonstrate an extravagant greed for money.

Here are a couple of documented prophecies of Benny Hinn: (1) On December 31, 1989 he prophesied, "The Spirit tells me Fidel Castro will die in the 90's. Ohh my! Some will try to kill him but they will not succeed, but there will come a change in his physical health." Fidel Castro is 83 years old, he's still alive. (2) In the same year Hinn prophesied: "The Lord also tells me to tell you that in the mid 90's, about '94-'95, no later than that, God will destroy the homosexual community of America (audience applauds)." Here it is 2009 and the homosexual community is stronger than ever before. Many of his crusades are conducted in third world countries where the people are uneducated and easily deceived. In 2000 before a crusade in Kenya he predicted on TBN: "I know deep in my soul, something supernatural is going to happen in Nairobi, Kenya. I may very well come back with video footage of Jesus on the platform! You know that the Lord appeared in our Crusade in Romania recently, and there's video of it." On a number of occasions before the Kenya crusade he predicted that Jesus would appear physically. Jesus never appeared, but thousands of Kenyans flocked to the crusade to see Jesus. Four people and one baby were crushed by the mob. After the crusade, one of Hinn's assistants, Charles Babbler (that's really his name) reported: "We counted money for two days. I have never seen so much money in all my life."

Jesus said to be on your guard because there are plenty of wolves who appear as lambs, but they are intent on slaughtering the flock for their own gain. So, how can you spot wolves who aren't as evident as Benny? Easy. Jesus said you will recognize them by their fruit.

The second word picture Jesus used was fruit. Jeff Foxworthy says, "If you've been married three times and still have the same in-laws...you might be a redneck." But the Bible says:

(2) If you claim to be a Jesus-follower, but there's no Jesus-fruit in your life...you're probably religious but lost

"By their fruit you will recognize them." You don't have to be a botanist to know the reason you can't pick grapes from thornbushes is that a plant only produces fruit after its own nature. An apple hangs on a tree because that tree has an inner apple nature. And Jesus said it doesn't matter what a person *says*, you must examine their fruit—their lifestyle—to determine their true nature. I can say anything. For instance, "I'm a car. I'm a car. Beep. Beep." But just saying it doesn't make me a car. I don't have a car nature on the inside, so there is no car exterior. Likewise, I can say, "I'm a Christian! I'm a Christian!" But don't take my word for it, look to see if I have the nature of Christ displayed in my life.

So what is the fruit of a Jesus follower? That's easy because the fruit of the Jesus-life is spelled out in Galatians 5:22, "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." If you forget those nine personality traits, just walk around our foyer, because they are printed above each of the doors entering this room. Think about it, those nine fruit describe the personality of Jesus. He is loving, joyful, patient... just go down the list. Now, these aren't personality traits you have to try to produce yourself to imitate Jesus. According to John 15, we are branches, and Jesus is the vine. Our only job is to abide in Jesus—stay firmly connected to Him. As we fully surrender our personality to His, He produces this good fruit in our lives for others to see.

Somebody sent me a funny Far Side cartoon not long ago. It was a picture of a scientist who had invented a machine to translate what dogs were really saying when they barked. As he wore the machine everywhere he went he understood what dogs were really saying. It was really simple. The dogs were actually saying, "Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey!"

A dog can't talk like a person (except in the movies) because it doesn't have a person nature. A person in religiosity can't produce Jesus fruit for the same reason—they don't have a Jesus-nature. You've probably heard the expression, "Actions speak louder than words." That's true, but when it comes to being a Jesus-follower, fruit speaks louder than words.

The last word picture Jesus employed was a final exam. Jeff Foxworthy says, "If the only necktie you own is being used as a gas cap for your truck...you might be a redneck. But the Bible says:

(3) If you're good at religious language and activities but don't know Jesus...you're certainly religious but lost

Jesus looked into the future until the time when there would be a final judgment, a final exam, and said, "Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" These sound like religious people, don't they? They know the correct language, "Lord, Lord." They've been involved in religious activities. In fact they're SO religious they've even jumped into exotic religious activities like trying to cast out demons and perform miracles. But then Jesus will say to them, "Get away from

me. I don't know you and I've never known you." Jesus didn't say there would only be a few people in that situation, He said MANY will be victims of religiosity.

Some people really think they are going to heaven because of their religious affiliation, but they are deceiving themselves. They might be good people, who have done a lot of good deeds, but they aren't a genuine Christian. Did you hear about the \$20 bill that got into circulation? It did a lot of good for a while. It bought food for a hungry family. It bought shoes for a little barefoot boy. It even got in the offering plate of a church and paid the light bill. It continued in circulation for several weeks until one day it arrived at the bank and in the hands of an expert was declared to be a counterfeit and was burned. Sadly, I'm afraid that describes a lot of people who are religious but lost. They have performed a lot of good deeds, but in the end, they will be declared to be a counterfeit by Jesus.

To me, these are some of the saddest words found in all of the Bible. These aren't the atheists and agnostics who thumbed their nose at God all of their lives. These are obviously religious people who truly expected to get into heaven, but they are in for an unpleasant surprise.

Through the years I've encountered many people who used the right language. They talked about the Lord a lot. In fact, they usually call Him "the Good Lord." As in, "Yep, me and the Good Lord are tight!" They call Him the Good Lord or the Man Upstairs, but they don't talk much about Jesus being the Lord of their lives. They can even say, "Praise the Lord" and "amen" at the right times. They brag of their religious activities—they may not cast out demons, but they can sure dress up on Sunday, give the Lord a little of their money, a little of their time, and a little of their thoughts. These religious people who never came to know Jesus will one day stand before Him and plead their case. They'll argue, "Wait, Lord! I was baptized! I attended church! I asked the blessing before I ate! I received communion! Wait a minute, Lord! I did all this stuff!" And Jesus will say, "Sorry. I don't know you and I've never known you." Religiosity can be harmful to your eternal health.

The night before He was crucified, Jesus was praying to His Father and He defined eternal life in John 17:3, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Look at that verse carefully, because your eternity is resting on understanding that eternal life is knowing God and knowing Jesus.

The Apostle Paul learned this because he wrote, "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing (there's the word again) Christ Jesus my Lord...I want to KNOW Christ and the power of his resurrection." (Philippians 3:8-10)

When you become a real Christian you don't receive a religion you receive a Person—Jesus Christ. It's like when a guy gets married he doesn't go to his friends and say, "Hey, I became a member of the institution of marriage last weekend." No, he says, "I got married last weekend and now I have a wife!" Some people say, "I joined a certain church or a religion." Others say, "I came to *know* Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior."

CONCLUSION

Knowing facts about the life of Jesus is not the same thing as knowing Jesus. You can memorize the facts about Jesus Christ and still not know Him. You can know that He was born of a virgin, and even know that He lived a sinless life, died on the cross for sin, was raised from the dead, and is coming back again. You can know all those facts and still not know Jesus.

For instance I know a lot *about* Abraham Lincoln. I know he was born February 12, 1809 in Hardin County, Kentucky. He was elected the 16th President in 1860 and re-elected in 1864. I can know he was assassinated in Ford's Theater in Washington D.C. on April 14, 1865. I can know all these facts about Abraham Lincoln, but I don't know him personally. Why? I never met him, and he's now dead. But I know Jesus Christ. He's not dead, He's alive. I talk to Him every day. It's true that some people think I'm a little crazy because I speak to Jesus. I guess you would think I was a little crazy if I claimed to know Abraham Lincoln, too. And I guess I could try to talk to him as well. "Hey Abe! Thanks for being a great President! I love you for how you led our nation through its darkest hour." Sure, I could talk to Abe, but he isn't talking back. And if I ever thought he did—I really would be crazy.

But there are thousands of people right here in Tyler who talk to Jesus on a regular basis and it's not a monologue—they claim He talks back. He doesn't speak audibly—it's louder than that. These people claim that God speaks to them through His Word, through the impressions of the Holy Spirit—and some of them even claim God speaks to them when their pastor or some other teacher is sharing the Word. These aren't crazy people; these are people who know Jesus.

One of my favorite writers was Vance Havner, and in one of his books he told a story about a husband who came home from work one afternoon to find that his wife was visibly upset. He said, "Honey, what's wrong?" She said, "This afternoon a man came to our front door and rang the doorbell. I didn't recognize him, but he was well-dressed so I opened the door. He said, 'Good afternoon, ma'am. Could I ask you a question? Do you know Jesus Christ?' When he asked me that I was so flustered that I shut the door in his face, and I've been thinking about his question all afternoon."

Her husband got upset and said, "Honey, why didn't you just tell him that you and I are charter members of our church, that you've been teaching a ladies Sunday School for 20 years, and you sing in our choir every Sunday? Why didn't you tell him that?" She thought for a moment and said to her husband, "That's not what he asked; he asked if I knew Jesus."

May I ask you the same question? "Do you know Jesus Christ?" It's a yes or no question. When I was preaching in Yantis a few weeks ago, somebody asked me if I knew Louie Gohmert. It was simple yes or no question. I didn't say, "I'm not sure." Or "I think so." I said, "Yes, Louie is my friend. I talk to him on a regular basis." My friend, you can be just as certain that you know Jesus Christ as well. And knowing Jesus is the greatest thing in life!

Have you paid attention to Jesus' three warnings about the dangers of religiosity? First, He said to watch out for vicious people who appear as innocent as lambs on the outside, but on the inside, they're waiting to tear you to shreds. Second, He's instructing us to judge people by the fruit of their lives rather than the fruit of their lips. But most of all, He has issued a personal warning to each one of us: Don't depend on religion to get you into heaven—there's only one

way—and that's by knowing Jesus Christ—do you know Him? If you'd like to meet we'd love to introduce Him today! Once you meet Him your life will never again be the same.

OUTLINE

Introducing a new word: Religious + Lost = ReligiLOSTity

(1) WOLVES: If you act nice around some people but on the inside you're mean and vicious...you might be religious but lost

"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them." *Acts 20:29-30*

(2) FRUIT: If you claim to be a Jesus-follower, but there's no Jesus-fruit in your life...you're probably religious but lost

"The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." *Galatians 5:22*

(3) FINAL EXAM: If you're good at religious language and activities but don't know Jesus...you're certainly religious but lost

Jesus prayed: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." *John 17:3*

Paul wrote: "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...I want to KNOW Christ and the power of his resurrection." *Philippians 3:8-10*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes