

THE REAL JESUS: HIS MINISTRY

Week Four | June 10, 2018 | Jesus is Sovereign Over Worship

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 5:33–39 and Luke 6:1–11. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Because Jesus is God, He has the authority to determine what true worship is.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

What you believe about Jesus determines how you follow Him and what you think worship is.

MEDITATE

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: What is hypocrisy? Why do we hate it so much?

In his best-selling book, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*, Reza Aslan seeks to dig “behind” the Biblical accounts of Jesus’ life to construct a portrait of Him that he considers more historically and culturally accurate. He determines that objective history that is not distorted by mythical accounts or tradition tells us very little about Jesus. All we know, he says, is that Jesus was born in Nazareth and grew up as a poor laborer. He was a faithful disciple of John the Baptist and learned about the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God from John. Upon John’s death, Jesus continued His ministry by promoting the message of the coming of an earthly, political theocracy ruled by God and His anointed one, the Messiah. He argues that Jesus never sought to found a church or a new religion. In fact, Aslan argues, rather than opposing the Jewish religious leaders, He was more concerned with Roman oppression of the Jews. He says that the last week of Jesus’ life He entered into Jerusalem with His disciples in a provocative royal entrance that was a declaration of war against the Roman government. The Romans arrested Him for claiming to be King of the Jews. Only the Roman Senate could appoint kings, so a self-proclaimed king was treasonous.

Aslan’s fatal flaw is his claim that he has discovered “objective” history void of any distortion by myth or tradition. Critics of his work argue that he has merely cherry-picked certain facts and used them to weave a narrative that is more appealing to him. Far from being objective, Aslan is pushing his own agenda. Aslan is not the only one who seeks “confirmation bias,” or a presentation of facts that confirm a position you are already committed to. The Pharisees operated the same way. Instead of adjusting their ideas of Jesus on the basis of the evidence presented, they found a way to interpret those facts that confirmed what they were determined to think about Him. In the end, they get Jesus wrong.

It is true that Jesus proclaimed the coming of the kingdom, a reality inaugurated by His coming to earth to die on the cross and defeat sin and death. But instead of coming to establish a theocracy by defeating the Roman government, Jesus’ first coming was to defeat an even greater foe, Satan. He was not the Messiah many people expected, but He was far greater than anything they could have imagined. It is true that Jesus did not intend to start a “new” religion. He came not to abolish the Law of Moses, but to fulfill it. He came as the fulfillment of God’s promise in Genesis 3:15 to one day undo the curse and restore what sin had broken.

Jesus was also openly critical of the way “religion” had been distorted by the Jewish leaders. They were far more concerned with control, power, and self-righteousness than with truly following Yahweh. Their worship

was based on legalistic practices and “good works” they believed would earn them favor with God. Jesus pulled no punches when it came to calling out their hypocrisy and pride. He deconstructed their distorted idea of true worship and brought it back to what God has always intended it to be. Far from introducing something new, Jesus continued the story God has been writing from the beginning.

Q: *Discuss how hypocrisy is present in the Church today. How does the desire for control, power, fame, or self-righteousness manifest itself?*

Q: *How do these desires manifest themselves in your own life?*

Q: *How should one overcome hypocrisy?*

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. TRUE WORSHIP BRINGS JOY

2. THE END OF TRUE WORSHIP IS CHRIST, NOT THE LAW

GOING DEEPER

+ This next section will help show what God’s Word says about this week’s particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week’s biblical truth.

TRUE WORSHIP BRINGS JOY

■ LUKE 5:33–39

Q: *Why were the Pharisees offended by Jesus?*

Q: *What do you think happiness has to do with holiness?*

After Jesus' scandalous meal with Levi, now called Matthew, and his friends, the Pharisees were furious. The man who claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah was not sitting among the leaders of the synagogue helping them overthrow the oppressive Roman government. Instead, He was eating and drinking alongside the outcasts of society and those considered the "unclean." To make matters worse, He had exposed them as leaders whose "faith" was really fraudulent and whose "religious devotion" was really deception. Rather than affirming their ministry, their interpretation of the Bible, and their way of life, Jesus critiqued it and called it into question.

If this continued, they would have a big problem on their hands. More and more people would begin to follow Jesus instead of them. The Pharisees and scribes would lose their position as the religious elite and would be overthrown by this "imposter" claiming to be the Promised One of God. They determined to find a way to take Jesus down before He did irreparable damage.

So, the Pharisees and scribes tried to publicly humiliate Jesus and expose Him as a fraud. They make a passive aggressive comment in verse 33, noting that John's disciples fast and say prayers just like they do. But Jesus' disciples, in contrast, go around eating and drinking and being merry. What kind of serious religious followers are they? The disciples are far too happy to be holy and far too joyful to be serious about God, the religious leaders suggested. What kind of leader is Jesus if He Himself eats with the wrong crowd and His followers are so carefree?

The underlying idea behind this comment is that abstaining from things that are pleasant, like eating good food, is better than partaking in them. They thought it was more holy to avoid anything earthly that makes you happy in order to be more heavenly-minded. They also thought abstaining from worldly goods proved a greater devotion to God. In sum, the religious taught that it is what you do or don't do that makes you more godly and pleasing to Him. They were suspicious of anything that brought too much pleasure or joy, equating it with sin and God's displeasure. Yet this belief does not come from the Bible. On the contrary, Scripture teaches that God created a good world full of gifts that bring joy and pleasure to His image bearers. When we enjoy the goodness of creation, we worship the Creator.

When sin entered the world, however, we began seeking our satisfaction and happiness, not in the God that the good gifts point to, but in the gifts themselves. We turned gifts into idols and began worshipping them instead of the Giver of the gifts. The solution is not in refusing the gifts, but in having a changed heart that leads to a

change in worship. Rather than worshiping the gifts as idols, we are to find our ultimate satisfaction and happiness in God alone. Then we are free to enjoy His gifts for what they are—expressions of God’s kindness and grace to us. Rather than going to the heart of the matter, the Pharisees and scribes treated the symptoms and just made matters worse. They created extrabiblical rules and imposed them as a requirement for everyone else to follow.

❓: *Can you think of examples of Christians who rigidly hold to their own personal rules that are really extrabiblical? In what ways do you do this?*

❓: *What is the danger of holding rigidly to extrabiblical rules and imposing them on others? How does this affect the unity of the Church? How does this distort or confuse the gospel?*

To respond to this criticism, Jesus uses the metaphor of a wedding. Jewish weddings were made up of three parts. The parents made a contract agreeing that their children would be united in marriage. To seal the deal, the groom’s family gave the bride price to the bride’s family. Then, the bride waited for an undetermined period of time while the groom prepared a place for them to live as husband and wife. The bride eagerly waited for the groom’s return, which signified that everything was ready and they could be wed. Finally, when the groom returned for his bride, the wedding celebration began. For seven days the whole community joined in the celebration with dancing, music, and much feasting.

In verse 34, Jesus refers to His coming as the coming of the groom for the bride, which calls for celebration and rejoicing, not doom and gloom. It would be entirely improper for the guests of a wedding to abstain from the festivities and fast instead. In the same way, it would be unfitting for the disciples to fast and renounce when Jesus, the bridegroom, had finally come for His bride, the Church. They should be rejoicing and celebrating that the time had finally come when God sent His Son to redeem once and for all!

Following Jesus is not about earning good standing through ascetic practices or by purposely finding no pleasure in any good thing in creation. Instead, it is about being united to Him through the forgiveness of sin and finding your salvation in Him alone by grace through faith. With Christ on the throne of your heart and at the center of your worship, following Him leads to joy and celebration!

Idols tell us the lie that following them leads to true happiness. In reality, they only lead to death, the real doom

and gloom. Following the Son leads to life and joy. John makes this exact point when he says, “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:20–21).

Jesus then compares His arrival to a new garment and new wine. It would make no sense to buy a new pair of pants, bring them home, cut off the legs, and sew on the legs of your old pair. Similarly, if you find mold growing in your bathroom, you can’t just put new paint on top. You have to remove every spore before repainting, otherwise it will just grow back, no matter how good of a paint job you do. In Jesus’ analogy, the old garment and the old wineskins represent the Old Covenant and the old form of worship that required the people to seek their holiness by keeping themselves separate from what is unclean. Now that the New Covenant has come, it is possible to be declared clean through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. It would make no sense to keep the old law of works and just add Christ to it.

Unfortunately, we do this all the time. We claim Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for ourselves, but we still seek to earn God’s favor or our sense of righteousness through our good works. Thabiti Anyabwile says, “We cannot have the gospel with just a little touch of law and legalism. We cannot have the law with just a few ounces of ‘Jesus’ poured in. The gospel is an entirely different garment—a complete garment in itself....Those who drink the old religion of self-righteousness will not enjoy the new wine of the gospel.” It is very important that we don’t trust our own righteousness. Even our best intentions are still mixed with false motives, pride, and self-importance. The only righteousness we can trust is the one given to us through Christ. It is His righteousness that is imputed to us and our sin is imputed to Him.

Q: *What rules of self-righteousness can you identify in your own life? Try asking people who know you well what they think.*

Christians today are sometimes confused about the term *legalism*. The strong desire that some Christians have to live their lives according to the moral commands of Scripture, e.g., The Ten Commandments, by the commandments given by our Lord Jesus (John 14:15), and by biblical spiritual principles is not to be considered as legalism. That’s simply obedience to God’s Word. Rather, *legalism* is an attitude, “characterized by an over-emphasis on rules or ritual. It tends to rely on the human performance of regulations as a means of acceptance by God. It tends to depreciate relationship and elevates performance, both of which are important aspects of the covenantal relationship between a holy God and sinful humanity.”¹ Moreover, some of the traditions and teachings of men today are taken

from Scripture but out of context and interpreted in such a way that such men introduce their own presuppositions, agendas or biases to suit their purposes. Consequently, pressing people to obey such traditions and teachings could also be considered as *legalism*.

Q: *How does legalism pave the way for both pride and a sense of condemnation?*

Q: *How do you think you overcome legalism? Can you think of Scripture passages that give insight?*

THE END OF TRUE WORSHIP IS CHRIST, NOT THE LAW

■ ■ LUKE 6:1-11

Q: *What were the Pharisees offended by in this passage? How do you think it relates to the issues Jesus raised in the previous passage?*

Q: *What do you think Jesus means when He says, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath?"*

Legalism is a particularly dangerous sin. Unlike other more obvious sins, it disguises itself as piety and faithfulness, making it particularly difficult to detect. Instead of other sins that cause people to run away from spiritual practices or the community of faith, legalism runs to outward piety and faithfulness, but for the wrong reasons. Pharisees also tend to be very interested in knowing what other people are doing or not doing. They take pride in comparing their holiness to the lack of holiness others demonstrate. They also enjoy condemning others for not following the Law like they believe it should be followed. But, in this passage, we will see that the Pharisees' legalism caused them to miss the point of the Law altogether.

In verse 1, we learn that the disciples were out in the country walking through grain fields. As they were walking,

they plucked some grain with their hands. When the Pharisees, who were obviously stalking Jesus and His disciples, looking for ways to get them in trouble, saw them they blew the whistle. How dare they break the Sabbath by working! Granted, they weren't harvesting it with big reapers, only plucking enough grain to fit in their hands. However, technically speaking, that is still "harvesting," which is considered work, and work is forbidden on the Sabbath. This interpretation of God's command to observe the Sabbath is a distortion of God's Word.

The Sabbath is patterned after God's work of creation. For six days He created the world, and on the seventh day He rested. God built this rhythm into creation as well. Work is good, but rest is too. There is such a thing as the sin of laziness, or refusing to work, and there is also such a thing as the sin of workaholism, or refusing to rest. God created us to be creatures who worship and enjoy God through work, or care of creation. At the same time, we are finite beings who have limits and are completely dependent on Him. We need rest for our bodies, our minds, and our souls. Practicing rest is ultimately a practice of dependence on God rather than on ourselves.

But in verse 2, we learn that the Pharisees believe their interpretation of keeping the Sabbath is more important than even the basic needs of people. You can always identify a Pharisee by the way they consider their interpretation of the Law more important than people. As a result, they become cold-hearted, indifferent to the needs of others. They desire sacrifice over mercy, the opposite of what God says He desires in Hosea 6:6: "I desire faithful love and not sacrifice." Yet, not only did the Pharisees care more about their rules than people, they also proved they cared more about their rules than about Jesus Himself! They tried to force Jesus under their interpretation of the Law instead of worshiping Him as the fulfillment of it.

Q: *What are some cultural "rules" we have acquired that are actually unbiblical or extrabiblical?*

Q: *Discuss what pursuing mercy over sacrifice looks like in your own life.*

In His response to the Pharisees' accusation, Jesus references a story in Scripture about King David, Israel's greatest and most beloved king. In 1 Samuel 21:1–6, David and his men were on the run from Saul, who was trying to kill them. They grew hungry but had no food, nor was there a safe place for them to stop. The only option was to find safety in the temple. In the temple there was always "the bread of the Presence," real bread used as a memorial. As they switched out the bread each day, the only people who could eat the old bread were the priests.

However, when David and his men arrived famished, the priests gave them the bread of the Presence to eat. He

upheld the men's lives and their basic needs over ritual laws of the temple. He recognized that the point of the law was to uphold life, not promote death. The priest was never condemned in the Bible for his actions, and Jesus used him as an example for the Pharisees. You can keep the letter of the Law and miss the greatest commandment, which is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. In Matthew 22:37–40, Jesus says that on these two laws hang all the other laws. In other words, all the other laws must be read and interpreted through the lens of loving God and loving your neighbor. The Pharisees, instead, read the Law through the lens of earning their own righteousness. Jesus also teaches them that He is the Lawgiver and the One who has the right to interpret the Law. The Law, He says, is meant to serve man, not man to serve the law (Mark 2:27). Thabiti Anyabwile explains,

“The Pharisees serve the law, but the law was meant to serve them. The law was intended to protect them from overwork and the idolatry of work. It was to protect them from the routine that regularly forgets God by reminding them for a full day at the least that God is their God and they are his people. God gave the Sabbath to refresh the souls and bodies of people by having them meet with the Lord. How kind of God to dedicate an entire day for us to do nothing but know him, meet with him, enjoy him, and find ourselves refreshed by him. This is why good worship never exhausts but fills, energizing and making ready.”

Worship that pleases God is not centered on paying the penalty required by the Law to make ourselves holy, but is an expression of gratitude for the grace that has been given to us in Christ. Worship is a result of newness of life, not a means of trying to gain life. Those who have put their faith in Christ and have received His righteousness receive true rest for their souls, an eternal Sabbath where they are free to enjoy God's presence and respond in joyful adoration.

In verse 9, Jesus goes to the heart of the problem. If the Law is meant to give us righteousness, then we cannot do anything but follow the strictest letter of the Law. Rather than being free to serve others, in our quest for holiness we must protect ourselves from the “uncleanliness” of others. We forget that purity cannot come from the outside in, it must come from the inside out. The whole point of the Law is to love God and love our neighbor, but the way the Pharisees interpreted the Law does neither. True worship cannot pretend to honor God if it aims at creating our own righteousness at the expense of the well-being of those around us. Such “righteousness” is as filthy rags to God.

❓: *In contrast to the Pharisees' worship, what does worship that is pleasing to God look like? Can you think of Scripture verses that help answer this question?*

❓: *Pharisees make “possible” applications of the Bible “necessary” applications.*

Discuss the difference between the two. Then, consider how to determine which is which.

NEXT STEPS

+ Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.

- ❖ *Read Hebrews 4. How does entering into God's rest allow us to be truly transformed from the inside out?*
- ❖ *Looking at Hebrews 4, what does true worship mean? How is Christ the center of it? What does this look like practically in your own life?*
- ❖ *How should worship emphasize our joy and not merely our duty?*
- ❖ *The most obvious thing the term "worship" brings to mind is singing in church. How is worship much more than that? How does it encompass our whole lives? Can you think of areas of your life or activities in your everyday that are really opportunities for worship?*
- ❖ *Jesus shows a connection between worship and healing. What does this teach us about Christ-centered worship?*

PRAY

+ Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.

- Father, forgive me for holding my own personal rules and preferences too closely and for judging those who do not keep them.
- Holy Spirit, help me to discern the difference between a possible application of the Bible in my life, specifically when it comes to what God is calling me to do in light of the Word, and a necessary application we are all called to follow. Help me grow in love and charity for others. Help me not confuse the minor things for the main things of the gospel.
- Jesus, thank You that my righteousness does not come from my own doing, but is given to me by Christ. Help me to always remember this. May that truth remind me of how deeply I am loved by You. May it also give me a heart of gratitude and humility.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, and the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke).*

ENDNOTES

1. Utley, R. J. (2000). *The First Christian Primer: Matthew* (Vol. Volume 9, p. 258). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.

