

# God hates religion

Like I said earlier...

our food for thought dinners are all about giving us some food for thought about important ideas.

And on the menu tonight is the idea that God hates religion.

Now I wonder how you react to that idea?

It might seem a strange idea for a dinner put on by church....

maybe you thought it was a misprint or a tricky joke...

Or maybe you agreed with it.

I reckon we could all come up with some reasons as to why God might hate religion.

Its not hard to look around our world & see all the damage that religion does...

Wars... terrorism... oppression... injustice... hostility... conflict...

Religion's got a lot to answer for...

so maybe from that perspective we could see why God might hate it.

On a smaller scale... I reckon most of us equate religion with hypocrisy...

people saying one thing but doing another...

maybe God hates religion because he hates hypocrisy.

I once saw a survey of trustworthiness... where people had to rank people & their jobs in terms of how trustworthy they were...

I was a bit shocked to see that as a minister of a church I was ranked down with car salesmen & politicians!

So maybe I'm the wrong person to be talking to you tonight!!

But I want to suggest ... as food for thought tonight... that there is a different & far more important reason that God hates religion.

Its actually I think a very unexpected reason.

Its probably a reason that you are going to find hard to believe.

But here it is... God hates religion... because religion says that people can be made acceptable to God by doing things.

God hates religion because its a lie.

Is that unexpected? / surprising?

I reckon it might be... because I get to hear from lots of people about this stuff and just about everyone thinks that to be accepted to God... to be in God's good books... is all about doing religious things.

So if I were to ask you.... do you believe in God?....  
just about everyone here would answer yes.  
And if I were to ask you.... do you believe in heaven?....  
just about everyone here would answer yes.  
So if I were to ask you.... do you think you'll go to heaven?....  
just about everyone here would answer yes... or "I hope so.."  
So if I were to ask you.... why do you think that?.... why do you think you'll go to heaven...  
just about everyone will talk about religious type things they've done...

I was Christened as a baby...  
I was confirmed...  
I'm Catholic / Presbyterian / Anglican/...  
I go to church a bit...  
I've not broken too many of the 10 commandments...  
I've lived a pretty good life... not perfect... but pretty good... certainly more good than bad... I'm not evil.

People's confidence about being accepted by God & getting to heaven most often is all about things they've done.  
And if you're not sure about where you stand with God... not sure if you are in his good books...  
chances are its because you're not sure if you've done enough...

When you think about it... its a pretty big one to get right isn't it!  
When you boil it all down... there's nothing more important than being accepted by God... how could there be?.... and to get that wrong... terrible.

Here's the idea to think about;-  
Good people... religious people... don't go to heaven.  
Good people... religious people... aren't acceptable to God.

Its a strange idea I know.  
But its exactly what Jesus Christ taught.  
Jesus' mission was to make people acceptable to God...  
and he plainly taught that religion & living a good life can't cut it.

Let me give you a quick example from the teaching of Jesus in the Bible...  
Here's a story Jesus told to a bunch of very good, very religious people...

**10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.**

In Jesus' day the Pharisee was the ultimate religious person... the ultimate good person... incredibly moral... kept stacks of religious rules... if anyone was going to earn points with God and be acceptable to him... it'd be a Pharisee.

Tax collectors were the exact opposite... they were immoral... despised... if you had to choose a type of person definitely on the wrong side of God... you'd go with tax collector.

So back to Jesus' story...

**11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'**

He's good.

Gold medal at the religious olympics every time.

Did all the right things... every box ticked...

God would have to be impressed with him.

**Luke 18:13** "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

Its a stark contrast isn't it.

The tax collector had nothing to bargain with... nothing to bring to God... nothing to earn a place in God's good books.

All he could he was admit that he had nothing... that he wasn't good... he was a sinner... and beg for mercy.

Spot the person who was acceptable to God!

That's the point of Jesus' story.

And the punch line?

**Luke 18:14** "I tell you that ~~this man~~ the tax collector, rather than the pharisee ~~other~~, went home ~~justified~~ before accepted by God.

There you have it folks...

Jesus the expert on this stuff... told a bunch of good religious people... that religion doesn't work... doesn't fix things up between you & God...

Because you know why?

None of us are good enough... near enough isn't good enough when it comes to God.

God has a 100% pass mark.

Maybe some us might be able to get closer than others...

but its like missing the bus...

you miss it by 10sec, 10 minutes, 10 hours or 10 days...

you still miss the bus.

According to Jesus.. we all miss the bus of being acceptable to God on the basis of what we do... how we live.

Religion can't close the gap.

The only way forward is to do what the tax collector in Jesus' story did.

Throw yourself on God's mercy.

Which is a bit humiliating.

More dignified to get there on your own... but it doesn't work.

We need God to be merciful to us.

To treat us better than we deserve.

And if you're wondering how merciful God will be?...

Consider this...

Not long after telling the story.. Jesus, the Son of God, was killed.. crucified.. on a cross...

and the reason God allowed that to happen... was to make a way for undeserving people be made acceptable to him.

People like the tax collector in the story.... people like me & people like you.

When you think about it... the fact that Jesus had to die... must mean that there was no way we could sort things out with God on our own.

God hates religion... because it doesn't work...

If you want to be accepted by God... you need to give up trying... and instead start trusting in his mercy.

If you want to be accepted by God you need to deal personally with Jesus.

That's our food for thought tonight.

There are some pretty big ideas floating around in there...

I've left lots of loose ends...

that's the idea...

food for thought.

discussion starters for us to chew on together...

But I do want to let you know about a course Margie & I will be running on Wed nights called The God who saves.

It'll kick off in a few weeks time.

We'll be thinking about these things a bit more closely... having a look at the Bible together...

it won't be heavy... and its aimed at people who don't know much about the Bible...

if you'd like to be involved... talk to the person who invited you along tonight.

But for now why not have a discussion with the people you're sitting with about these things...  
You could start by talking about what you found surprising about that story Jesus told...