

The Life Challenge

"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." John 10:10

Series: Following Hard After Jesus

Title: More Than Religion

Speaker: Steve Berg

Text: Matthew 5:11-20

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WARM-UP

Reflect on a time in your life when someone said to you, "I want you to try harder." It might have been your parents, or your teacher, or your coach. How did you respond to the challenge? What positive things did the challenge teach you? What were the potential negative things that you have carried with you from the "try harder" challenges?

DISCUSSION

Jesus preaches a sermon to a large crowd on the elevated slopes of the Sea of Galilee, teaching what it practically means to live as a follower in the way of Jesus. He teaches that the Christian life is distinctive from the attitudes and actions of the religious people. Through His teaching Jesus presents two ways of living life - they look similar, but one will bring life, the other will destroy life.

1. SAC envisions that we will be a people who "follow hard after Jesus." Put in your own words what that would look like for you and for all of us as one church. What are the benefits of this? What are the pitfalls?
2. When you are presented with the vision of a person following hard after Jesus you may be inclined to do either of these things. How have you seen this to be true?
 - Try to work harder to earn God's high approval.
 - Try to work less by setting God's approval bar lower and trying to convince yourself and people around you that you are a good person.
3. Both of the inclinations in question 2, will lead people into religion. Here is a definition of religion: *Religion is a system of beliefs or a code of moral conduct that judges (qualifies or disqualifies) a person based on their adherence and obedience to certain codes, rules, laws, traditions, or the performance of required acts.*
What do you see in your life and the church that may be more about religion than following Jesus?
4. So Jesus presents following after Him as distinct from following a religion. Following Jesus is MORE than religion. Jesus puts before us two paths - following in Jesus' way, or following in the religious way. One is true and will flourish in your life; one is untrue and it will destroy your life. With these two paths in mind, start reading together through the sermon beginning with Matthew 5:11 - 7:29. Stop regularly to discuss and consider the applications that Jesus is making about following Him as distinctive from slipping into following a Christian religion. You will not get through it all, but take time to listen to what the Spirit is saying to you in Jesus teaching.