I Believe – Part 2

# The Good News

# (Romans 3:19-22)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We’re in part two of a message series called “I Believe” considering some of the barriers, struggles, and arguments that people may have for rejecting Christianity. Last week, we talked about having a distorted view of who God is and how this is really all around us because this is the worldview that has enveloped our culture, our schools, and the media which tells us the Bible has nothing to do with science. Everywhere you go our culture has embraced a theory that the world is billions of years old, that man evolved from apelike ancestors, and that it was a Big Bang brought the universe as we know it into existence.

Over the past 50 years our culture that has made a subtle switch from a Christian worldview to a secular humanistic religion. In an attempt to escape from any form of accountability to God, our culture has plunged headlong into its own form of religion. And so, students are being progressively conditioned to believe that the Bible teaches religion, and it’s the schools that teach real science and real history. However, the ideas that the world teaches as fact, the theories it except as truth, take a whole lot more faith to believe than what God has said and recorded in the Bible.

And so, undeniably the worldview in America today is one of faith. Atheism in all its forms is a faith; it’s a religion. I went online to see what faith was, not faith according to the Bible, but faith according to the world, right? And so, overlooking any references to religion I discovered that number one, according to Google, faith was “Complete trust or confidence in someone or something”. Secondly, according to Bing, faith is “a strongly held belief or theory” and both evolutionists and scientists agree that the theory of evolution is a religion, it’s a religious faith, because it is a strongly held belief or theory that must be accepted by faith. Therefore, what we have in America today is a secular humanistic religion that is being forced on you and your children whether you like it or not.

Now the problem we face as the Church is that when you begin to think of the world in billions of years, mankind having evolved from nothing, and the improbability that an explosion brought everything that we know and love into existence, it’s virtually impossible to also wrap your mind around the good news of Jesus Christ. You see, when you believe in billions of years and evolution it’s impossible to also believe in Genesis chapters 1 through 12, because there’s no need for a creator, there’s no sin, no need of redemption, no worldwide flood, no scattering of people into different languages, and no salvation or good news. It’s for this reason, because of the school systems, scientists, politicians, and the secular media, that many people in our culture have fallen for a lie.

Today, I believe there are many people who would like to be open-minded in their thinking. They want to believe in God, but when they look at the church, when they consider Christianity, they see it merely as another religion and their minds become clouded. And so, many people find it easier just to believe a lie, because everybody else does, and look at Christianity as something that is irrelevant and gets in the way of what they really want to do anyway. And so, we’re going to talk about the good news, but to understand the good news we also have to understand the bad news. And so, number one, let’s start with the bad news. Number one, the bad news, the trouble with religion.

## 1. The Trouble with Religion

Now to begin I need you to understand that when I say religion I’m not talking about Christianity. When I say religion, I’m referring to a particular system of faith, a pursuit or interest to which someone ascribes supreme importance. And if you’ll bear with me you’ll see why I say that because there’s actually a giant chasm between Christianity and religion. And so, what we’re going to talk about today is the good news about Jesus and the bad news about religion.

This is actually something that Jesus addressed on many occasions, because being God in the flesh he knew the hearts of men and therefore he knows that saving faith is deeper than just what we profess to believe. Jesus is keenly aware that it’s not just what you say, how you dress, look, or act that makes you right with God. You see, a religious person might ascribe to a certain teaching and diligently study special books. A religious person might pray, chant, or recite something devoutly. They might be in a church, or temple, or go to a special place every time the doors are open, but there’s much, much more to saving faith than that. In fact, the Bible tells us,

“You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror” (James 2:19, NLT).

What we learn from the life and teachings of Jesus is that a Christian is one who first and foremost has been transformed by a personal relationship with King of Kings and Lord of lords. And it’s because of that primary relationship that we sincerely love others. In fact, Jesus spoke very clearly about this on many occasions and in John chapter 15 he said it this way,

"When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you” (John 15:10-12, NLT).

And so, he was talking about relationship, not religion. He was talking about remaining in him, staying in him, living in him, so that you would know his joy, that his joy would fill you, and that your joy would overflow. And so, he says follow my example: “Love each other as I have loved you, obey my commands, continue in this relationship with me, remain in it, not just by going to church, not just by reading books on faith, but by spending time with me, loving me and loving others. As a matter of fact, Jesus said it this way in Matthew chapter 25, he said,

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers (or sisters) of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

And that’s why Jesus was so strong in his rebuke of the Pharisees, this group of religious men who went to great extremes to keep all these religious rules but didn’t have any love. He said of them in Matthew chapter 15,

"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; because their teachings are nothing but rules taught by men” (Matthew 15:8-9).

In fact, some of Jesus harshest words in his entire ministry were directed at the Pharisees and the teachers of the law and these words should shock us into considering our own lives, our actions and attitudes, so that we avoid making the same disastrous mistake that the Pharisees made. You see, these were the Bible teachers, the pastors of that day, and yet they were like whitewashed tombs, it was all external, and they had made a mockery of faith and spirituality. They’d actually squeezed all the joy that Jesus had promised out of a relationship with God and had reduced faith to a long list of impossible rules and regulations. Therefore, what they’d created in the name of God was billions of years away from the life of love that God intended for his people to demonstrate and enjoy. It wasn’t good news, it was bad news!

And so, Jesus scolded them in Matthew chapter 23 saying,

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces. You won't go in yourselves, and you don't let others enter either…. For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you yourselves are! "Blind guides! What sorrow awaits you…” (Matthew 23:13, 15-16, NLT).

The unfortunate thing is that today, there are still those who take the good news and try their best to squeeze the life out of it. In fact, if Jesus were standing here today, I’m sure his message to many churches would be the same, “What sorrow awaits you, you hypocrites!” And so, we don’t want to fall into the same trap of the Pharisees fell into, we don’t want that message directed at us, but how do we avoid it? Well, number two, we want to move away from hypocrisy.

## 2. Moving Away from Hypocrisy

You see, the Pharisees’ religion, their version of Judaism, was nothing short of showmanship. And so, in Matthew chapter 23, Jesus spoke directly to the image they were projecting, this elevated religious ego, and he addressed their teaching, their giving, their prayers, the way they dressed, the way they carried themselves in public, and the honor they demanded, because they were focused on the external rather than the internal. And yet even their Old Testament Bible says very clearly,

“The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

It was with a superficial arrogance the teachers of law and Pharisees dressed themselves with long flowing robes, religious ornaments, and used their religious devoutness in a condescending and contemptuous way. Jesus said of them in verse five,

“Everything they do is for show” (Matthew 23:5, NLT).

Now, we don’t do these things in the exactly the same way, but shouldn’t we be cautious of every form of pretense in our lives? Shouldn’t we be watchful for any habit or attitude that’s purpose is to exalt ourselves, instead of loving God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and loving others as we love ourselves? You see, Jesus said these are the most important commandments in the law and he condemned the practice of these religious men saying,

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too” (Matthew 23:25-26, NLT).

In other words, focus on the internal, focus on your heart, focus on your relationship with God instead of been so concerned about the outward appearance. You see, Jesus wasn’t condemning the custom of ceremonially washing dishes, but he was saying that it was pointless to perform religious rituals when your heart is far from God and your life is filled with sin. Meanwhile, the teachers and Pharisees would go out on the street corners, they’d wear these fancy robes, their religious garb, and they’d put on this big religious show, acting all pious and holy, loudly praying these long prayers, not so that God would hear them, but so that everyone else could. Then they’d turn, they’d walk down the street and take advantage of the poor, the innocent, and the widows. They’d lie to the people under their care, they’d burden people with rules and requirements, and it was all about the external, but it wasn’t a reflection of the heart of God.

The Pharisees thought that by their outward efforts, their religious acts, by trying harder, being better, and doing religious things that they could somehow close the gap, drawing closer to our holy and righteous God. And that’s why Jesus said,

“Don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them” (Matthew 6:5, NLT).

He said that because their faith, their religion was only external, it was for show and it hadn’t transformed their hearts. And so, not only were they burdened by hundreds of rules that they’d made, but they burdened others with them too. Yet the laws that God established, the laws that God gave us, were not to burden us, but to free us so that we can have the life that he wants us to have. Now, maybe some of you are confused, but hold on because I’m going to share with you some good news. The apostle Paul explains this in Romans chapter 3, he says,

“Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are… But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes… (Romans 3:19-22, NLT).

And so, that’s good news, right? God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law. He said, the law was given to keep us from having excuses, to show us that we’re guilty before God, because no one can ever be made right with God by keeping the law. It’s impossible. And so, it doesn’t matter how hard you try, what kind of church you go to, how religious you are, how many good deeds you do, you can’t be good enough to please God by your works. And that’s why this is good news. Because number three, there is a righteousness from God apart from the law.

## 3. A Righteousness from God

This is good news! The law was given for a purpose; it was given to keep people from having excuses and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. And so, we’re all accountable, none of us are good, and we all must answer for ourselves. None of us will be able to say that we didn’t know what God expected. None of us will get away with saying it’s not my fault. There are no theological loopholes, no backdoors, no opportunities to debate with God, to argue our case, to defend our actions or challenge his methods. But the good news is that there is a righteousness from God. Verse 22 tells us,

“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (Romans 3:22).

We’re made right with God, not by trying harder, trying to be better, trying to be more religious, but by putting our complete trust, our confidence in the work of Jesus Christ. It’s the gift of God to all who believe and so it doesn’t matter how bad your past was, or even how bad your present is right now, because when you put your faith in Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven, and you’re made completely new. You see, Christianity is not Christ plus good works. It’s not Christ plus religion. But it’s through faith in Christ and in Christ alone.

As a matter of fact, one of my favorite stories in the Bible is the eyewitness account of Jesus on the cross. He’s hanging there dying for the sins of the world, he’s paying the price for your sins and mine on a cross between two other criminals who are also being executed. And Luke tells us in his gospel,

“One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him saying, "Don't you fear God since you’re under the same sentence? We’re punished justly, we’re getting what our sins deserve, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:39-42).

Jesus answered him with these amazing words of grace and truth. Here’s this criminal, his last actions as a free man resulted in him being executed. Now, he’s nailed to a cross, he can’t get down, he can’t do any good deeds, and he most certainly couldn’t go to church or get baptized. And so, there was nothing that he could do but believe and put his trust in Christ alone. This man looked at Jesus with a broken heart and asked him to remember him when he comes into his kingdom. Jesus responded with such grace, such tenderness, saying, “Today, you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43).

I want to make sure you get the power of this, because that is exactly what Jesus Christ has done for us. The Bible says that we’re “Infected and impure with sin…” (Isaiah 64:6, NLT). We have nothing to offer, we’re worthless, we’ve all gone astray, “there is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:12). And yet just like that criminal on the cross, Jesus takes our sin, he covers us, he clothes us with his perfection, with the robe of his righteousness. As God looks down, looking upon us, he doesn’t see our sinfulness, but he sees the righteousness of his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus who is interceding for us, turns to his Father and says, “I’ve got this one. He or she is mine”. And the Bible says,

“This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News” (Colossians 1:21-23, NLT).

Do you see the difference between religion and Christianity? This is such good news, religion is about trying to be good enough for God, working harder, and doing better, but Christianity is all about trusting in the work of Jesus. Religion is about what I do, hoping it’s good enough, and Christianity is about trusting in what Jesus did. You see, religion has always complicated what God made so simple. Just to love God with all of our ability and to love our neighbor as ourselves. I believe, and so as we close, I want to encourage you to spend time with him and to look for ways to love him through loving and serving others so that your joy may be full. Let’s pray together.

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