

101721 Growth Group Study

The Ugliness of Religion

John 11:45-57

*Jesus calls us,
not to religion,
but to life.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Background:

This week we see the fallout of the raising of Lazarus, and it is not good. The Religious Authorities meet to decide the fate of Jesus. And what we see are defining characteristics of “religion,” and they are ugly: a desire for power, a desire for control and a desire to exalt self. John interprets the response of the Religious Authorities by pointing us in the right direction, we are not children of religion, rather we are “children of God.” Over against the ugliness of religion, we are invited into a beautiful relationship of love as children of a good, good father.

Sermon Text (ESV):

John 11:45-57

45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

“What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.”

49 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! 50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”

51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. 53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

54 Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead he withdrew to a region near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

55 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. 56 They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple courts they asked one another, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the festival at all?” 57 But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.

Discussion Questions:

- Preparation
 - As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out to you most?
 - What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?
- Sermon Questions
 - We have heard that following Jesus may come “at a cost”. In general, what fears do people have about following Jesus? Which of these fears do you share?
 - Although following Jesus is costly in one respect, share with your group how His benefits have overcome any associated costs.
 - Shawn taught how “religion” wants to maintain power & control and therefore creates a hard shell focused on externals. Looking back at your life or currently, how have you “missed God in your midst” because of a focus on religion instead of relationship?

- How can we avoid being “crustacean Christians” and instead be salt & light to a world in need?
- Shawn shared some thoughts about what being a child of God might look like in the both the positive and negative (e.g., giving up control, praying without ceasing, maintaining humility, life of gratitude, church family involvement, etc.).
 - For you, what does being a child of God mean/look like? How can your group pray for you to more fully embrace this relationship?