REVD. DR. D. J. AJITH KUMAR

True Religion: Listening, Obeying, and Living in Peace

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KEY VERSE

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

READINGS

Mic 6:6–8; Psalm 119:169-176; James 1:19–27; Matthew 7:21–28

Introduction

In today's world, religion is often reduced to mere rituals, labels, or ideologies. But Jesus Christ calls us to a deeper, authentic expression of our faith – one rooted in listening to God's Word, obeying His will, and living a life of integrity and peace. As we reflect on the passages appointed for this Sunday, we are challenged to embrace what James calls a "pure and faultless religion." The true religion Jesus talks about is not superficial but transformative. It moulds our character, governs our actions, and reflects the peace and justice of God.

A Cry for Understanding and Salvation (Psalm 119:169-176)

Psalm 119 is a majestic meditation on God's law. In the closing verses (169-176), the psalmist cries out to God for understanding, deliverance, and direction. He acknowledges God's Word as a source of life and strength, even in moments of straying. This is the beginning of true religion: a deep longing to understand God's will. The psalmist listens with humility, recognizing human limitations and divine sufficiency. True religion starts not with performance but with posture – a posture of openness, dependence, and submission to God's voice.

Like a lost sheep seeking its shepherd, the believer returns to God, confident that His Word restores. We, too, must begin our spiritual journey by listening – not to the noise of the world but to the voice of our Shepherd who speaks through Scripture. Are we truly listening to God's voice in our lives? Or are we only hearing what pleases us? The first step in true religion is attentive listening with a heart ready to be led.

The Divine Expectation: Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly (Micah 6:6-8)

Micah 6 presents a divine courtroom where God brings a case against His people. They offer sacrifices, burnt offerings, even their firstborns, assuming that religious rituals can appease God. But the prophet Micah breaks through the ritualistic mindset with one of the most powerful summaries of God's expectations: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Here is the heart of true religion: not in outward rituals but in transformed relationships. Justice, mercy, and humility are not ceremonial acts; they are daily choices that shape communities and reflect the character of God.

In a world torn by injustice, Micah's call reminds us of people like William Wilberforce and Mother Teresa, who lived out their faith through justice and compassion. As Christians, we must ask: Is our

religion visible in how we treat others? Are we walking humbly or proudly in our so-called spirituality?

True Religion is Practical Faith (James 1:19–27)

James offers a straightforward and practical theology. He says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” (v. 22). James bridges the gap between belief and behaviour. James challenges the idea of passive religiosity. True religion is not found in merely attending services or quoting Scripture; it is lived out in self-control, care for the vulnerable, and moral integrity.

James speaks of a man who looks at himself in the mirror and forgets his appearance. Likewise, many hear God’s Word and walk away unchanged. But true disciples reflect the image of Christ through actions, especially by caring for orphans and widows – symbols of society’s most vulnerable. If our religion doesn’t lead us to serve, forgive, and live in holiness, it is hollow. Faith must work through love.

Obedience is the Foundation (Matthew 7:21-28)

In Matthew 7, Jesus closes the Sermon on the Mount with a warning and a parable. Not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of the Father. He illustrates this with the wise and foolish builders. One builds on the rock of obedience; the other on the sand of empty words. Jesus makes it clear: Religion without obedience is like a house without a foundation. It may look fine for a while, but it will not stand the test of time.

A strong foundation is not glamorous but essential. During storms, only homes built on solid ground survive. In life’s storms – suffering, temptation, trials – those rooted in obedience to Christ stand firm. Are we building our faith on feelings, words, and appearance? Or are we rooted in action and obedience?

The Difference Between Religiosity and Spirituality

In Micah 6:6–8, we encounter one of the most profound declarations in the Old Testament regarding what God truly desires from humanity. This passage contrasts religiosity – human attempts to please God through ritual and outward performance – with spirituality – the inner transformation and life aligned with God’s will. The prophet poses rhetorical questions: “With what shall I come before the Lord… Shall I come with burnt offerings… thousands of rams… my firstborn?” These questions reflect humanity’s misguided attempts to appease God through extravagant religious practices. This is religiosity – external, performative, and often self-centred. It is driven by a transactional mindset: “If I do this, God will be pleased.” But God’s answer, through the prophet, redirects our understanding. “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you?” The answer is stunning in its clarity and simplicity: “To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” This is spirituality – a life lived in genuine relationship with God and others.

These three requirements form the three limbs of authentic spirituality:

Passion for Justice – A heart that seeks fairness, equity, and righteousness in society. It challenges oppression, defends the weak, and strives to restore dignity.

Compassion for Others – A deep, active love that goes beyond feelings to tangible acts of kindness, mercy, and grace toward neighbours, especially the vulnerable.

Humility Before God – A posture of reverence and dependence, acknowledging our limitations and submitting our lives under God's sovereign will.

True spirituality, then, is not about how much we sacrifice, but how faithfully we live. Micah 6:6–8 calls the church today to move from ritualism to righteous living, from mere worship to witness, and from religiosity to deep, God-cantered spirituality.

Conclusion

True religion is not confined to the sacred walls of the church or the pages of a hymnal. It is found in hearts that listen to God, lives that act justly and love mercy, hands that serve the vulnerable, and feet that walk humbly. It is not a Sunday-only ritual but a daily lifestyle of obedience, compassion, and faithfulness. Jesus calls us beyond performance to authenticity. He desires disciples who hear and do, believe and behave, love and serve. Let us recommit ourselves to the way of true religion – listening, obeying, and living in peace.

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, We thank You for Your Word that guides us and convicts us. Help us not merely to hear Your voice but to follow it. Teach us to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with You. Purify our religion from all hypocrisy, and empower us to live as authentic disciples of Christ. May our faith be seen in our works, and may our love bring peace to those around us. Strengthen our foundations, so that we may stand firm in every season of life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.