MAKE IT REAL!

INTRODUCTION

When we went on holiday, one of my prayers to the Lord was that He would grant me vision and direction for us as a people for 2013. We had a wonderful break and by the grace of the Lord, I also believe He spoke to my heart about what our focus should be for 2013. I felt I should read through the book of Matthew and of course, chapters 5, 6 & 7 contain amazing direction from the Lord Jesus Himself.

Four interlinking themes came up and if I were to summarise them into one phrase, it would be “Make it real”.

MESSAGE

THEME 1 – DEAD RELIGION VS. THE REAL THING

Jesus was very outspoken, directing much of his criticism toward the scribes and Pharisees. He called them Hypocrites.

They were the religious leaders of the day, but instead of leading the people into a living, exciting relationship with God, they became self-centered, pompous and arrogant.

• They changed the Law of God which was meant to bring life to the people into a set of rules and regulations,
• They overlayed them with all kinds of man-made traditions and instead of bringing life,
• They weighed the people with heavy religion which was impossible to cope with.

Jesus told the people that their righteousness would need to exceed the righteousness of the Sadducees.

What would the differentiator be?

• Moving from trying to obey a narrow set of rules and regulations to a true broad understanding and application of what was really meant in the law.

Jesus gave them examples

Matthew 5:17-28 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Jesus first established the fact that he is not taking the Law away or diminishing it. What He came to do was fulfill it and bring proper interpretation and understanding.
Murder

21 “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. 23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

- Jesus identifies the fullness of the meaning, it goes way beyond the actual act of murder and looks at the attitude of heart of man toward others covering unrighteous anger and hatred
- He even extends it to cover the impact anger and unforgiveness has in terms of our giving of offerings. Allowing a wrong attitude to simmer would lead to hatred and could eventually result in physical murder.

Adultery

27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

- Once again Jesus identifies the fullness of the meaning which goes beyond the actual act of adultery and looks at the hidden desires in the heart of man heart of man.

Dead Traditions

Matthew 15:1-2 then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, 2 “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

It is so easy to turn God’s Word into a series of dead rules and regulations. The Pharisees even twisted it to suit themselves. This is why they accused Jesus of breaking the tradition of the elders.

Jesus criticized the Pharisees harshly, saying “you nullify the Word of God for the sake of your tradition.”

The scribes and Pharisees may well have obeyed the letter of the law, but inside their hearts was an entirely different picture. Jesus described them as white-washed tombs which looked all clean and neat on the outside but inside was stinking, rotting flesh and bones and death.

This was dead religion
Like the Pharisees and scribes and the people of the time, we are also quite capable of stripping the life out of His word when we start seeing it as mere rules, regulations and traditions.

- Jesus went on to speak about **forgiveness, not judging, loving enemies and not doing things just to be seen amongst others.**

- In essence, Jesus was saying, “don’t be a blind observer of rules, but apply and live the word of God out in every aspect of your life”. In Him we live and move and have our being.

God is calling us **out of lifeless, dead observance into true religion** in 2013. There is much darkness around and time is short, If we are not careful, we may slip!

**THEME 2 – SEARCH FOR THE TREASURE**

Reading the word is never a bad thing, but we can read the same scriptures over and over and never learn anything new. We need to seek out the treasure if we are to be able to understand the word in its fullness as Jesus did.

Give the example of the Lizard.

- Thought it was a bird then looked closer and saw it was a lizard
- Noticed that unless I saw it in the grass I would not have seen it on the rock as it was well camouflaged.
- Once I studied it and knew what it looked like on the rock, I noticed more lizards. With practice, I saw them everywhere
- This is like the word of God the treasures are there in plain sight but unless we know what to look for, we will read over them and not know any the better!
- We need to prayerfully study the word of God and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal His treasures. The more we do this, the more we will unveil the wonder of God's promises and blessings contained in his word. Quiet times will become an adventure in the word and bring new life into our walk with the Lord.

If we are to move from dead religion to real life, we will need to see and apply the hidden truths and treasures in the word to our lives.

This year, we must study the word carefully, prayerfully and diligently so that we can understand more and more and move into a relationship with the Lord which is alive and exciting.

**THEME 3 – GO ALL-IN**
Speak about the message that the pastor shared on Sunday 30 December when he challenged us to go all-in. He spoke about Texas Hold’em poker where a player can choose to make smaller bets or, if they have a very good hand, they can go “all-in” and bet all their money.

When we look at our relationship with the Lord, we need to evaluate whether we are holding back and making small bets or whether we are “all-in”.

Some examples of holding back are:

- When we limit our church attendance to when it suits us.
- When we don’t tithe.
- When we hold back on serving God fully.
- When we have irregular or no quiet times.
- When we don’t spend time in prayer.

God is challenging us to go “all-in” this year.

- All-in means to re-prioritize and give God first place.
- All-in means we will serve God on His terms and not our own.
- All-in means getting involved in the church activities instead of leaving it for someone else to do.
- All-in means we are willing to be God’s vessels whenever and howsoever He may desire to use us.

Participating in the Daniel fast is a good place to start. Attending prayer meetings and cell groups is also part of being “all-in”.

As we go “all-in” God’s promises come into play:

**Psalm 37: Take delight in the Lord**, and he will give you the desires of your heart. 5 **Commit your way to the Lord**; trust in him and he will do this: 6 He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.

- God will give us our hearts desires and reward us with righteousness and vindication.

**HOW WILL WE ABLE TO MAKE THIS TRANSITION TO REAL LIFE?**

**Ezekiel 37 - The Dry Bones Live**

1 The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. 2 Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and **indeed they were very dry**. 3 And He said to me, "Son of man, **can these bones live?**”

So I answered, "O Lord God, You know.”
4 Again He said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! 5 Thus says the Lord God to these bones: “Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. 6 I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.”’”

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.

9 Also He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.”’”

10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.

11 Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!’ 12 Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. 13 Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. 14 I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,” says the Lord.”

CONCLUSION

3 Simple themes:

- Dead religion vs. the real thing
- Search for the treasure
- Go all-in

Yesterday, the Lord spoke to us about the dry bones, about lifting Jesus high and about Isaiah 8:18 Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel From the Lord of hosts, Who dwells in Mount Zion.

If we can make a quality decision this year to focus on these 3 simple areas this year, we can experience a time of growth and blessing in our relationship with the Lord such as we may not have had for a long time, we can be for signs and wonders in our generation.

If we are going to be a light and a witness to others, they need to see us “making it real”.

As we continue with our 2013 Daniel fast, let us say as Joshua did: “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!” This need not be impossible as we call on the Lord to bring new life into these very dry bones.