

As we look at the fifth chapter of Matthew, we have Jesus giving one of his first public teachings. Now being his first real public teaching for Jesus, everyone was anxious to hear what he had to say about stuff.

I'm pretty sure when Jesus was done with his teachings, he was looking out at a sea of faces with their jaws hanging on the ground in disbelief.

This was not the feel good sermon of the year, folks. Simply put, Jesus pretty much painting a bleak picture of faith.

If I were a guy hanging around in those days, I'm sure I would have followed the crowd to hear this Jesus guy speak. I'm sure I would have been anxious to hear him talk about life in a much more positive tone. With all the rules and teachings of the religious leaders, as well as the iron fist ruling of the Romans, I would have had great anticipation in hearing Jesus say something to the tune of screw all these rules and let love win the day. People were hungry for a fresh voice to give them hope.

They would have gone anticipating a Woodstock love fest and found themselves in a military boot camp. I'm guessing "YIKES" was the common comment as he was speaking.

So what is the point Jesus was trying to make here?

It seems like Jesus was starting his ministry with a sermon that pretty much tells everyone they are going to hell. Instead of throwing out the rules of the day, he not only endorses them, but he throws in even more rules that make it that much tougher to win the game of life.

Now I've never been accused of being a marketing genius, but I'm kinda thinking that this is not the best approach to starting your ministry.

But that's why Jesus is the savior and I'm just a regular guy.

I had to read this several times before the light switch went on. It took me a while, but I finally got it, and when I did, I realized the genius of Jesus.

Underneath that military boot camp sermon I found the Woodstock.

In his first teachings, Jesus sets the table for his new approach to religion in a masterful manner.

What he is saying throughout chapters five, six and seven is that if you all want to live by rules and regulations, then I'll give you rules and regulations. If they say you should not kill, then I say if you even call someone a fool, you will go to hell. If they say love your brothers and sisters, then I say that's nothing – you better love your enemies or you're going to Hell. If they say it is a sin to commit adultery, then I say you will go to hell if you even look at a woman in lust.

What Jesus is trying to teach us is that if we think that religion is simply a list of do's and don'ts, then we are sadly missing the point of what religion is all about.

Religion was never intended to be a mechanical process for us, where if we do all this and avoid doing all that, we will go to Heaven.

Most of us have had dogs that understand how live with rules and regulations. If I do this, I get a treat. If I do that, I get a spanking.

Rules and regulations are fine if they are used as guidelines, but if they become the foundation of your religion then your religion is nothing more than an exercise of living life like mechanical robots.

Jesus wanted to present a new approach to religion built on faith. In order to do so, he had to start by breaking down the mechanical thinking that was so widely used then. If a person sinned against his neighbor, he had to make a sacrifice for the religious leader and say a specific set of prayers in order to get right with God.

Jesus would say if you sinned against your neighbor, go give him a hug, say you're sorry and invite him over for dinner. That's how you get right with God.

Jesus had to start his ministry by making a point that if we approach life by creating rules upon more rules, we'll never get right with God.

God is Love.

Love is an emotion.

You'll never find love in a world of mechanical living.

A religion built on rules closes down our hearts and makes us mechanical, where a religion built on love opens our hearts to honesty and truth which is the only way to make those rules attainable in the first place.