

Bible Stories for Adults

Scribes and Pharisees

Mark 8:11-21; Matthew 23

Opening

- Gathering: When have you seen examples of self-righteousness in the church today.
- Today's Focus: Jesus warned people against self-righteousness instead of God's righteousness.
- Key Verses: *Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.* Matthew 5:20
- You have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.* Matthew 23:23

Opening Prayer

Lesson

Darkest Days (*2 Chronicles 36:11-20*)

- What do the Jews remember as their darkest time in all of history? = Even worse than the Holocaust
2 Chronicles 36:17-20 = When they were conquered, destroyed and exiled by the Babylonians
- Why did this happen?
2 Chronicles 36:11-14 = Jews had rejected God and turned to worship gods of other nations
- Did God over-react to the faithlessness of one king, Zedekiah?
2 Chronicles 36:15-16 = No, God had a long history of patience through Jewish rejection
- Why did the Jews ignore God's warnings and efforts to call them back through His prophets?
Jeremiah 5:12-13 = They didn't believe that God would allow harm to come to His people

Repentance (*Nehemiah 8-10*)

- How were the Jews reminded of their history when they returned to Jerusalem after the exile in 450 BC?
Nehemiah 8:2-3, 8, 18 = Ezra read God's Word to them and Levites explained it (v7)
- Did hearing God's Word convict the Jews of their sinfulness?
Nehemiah 9:1-2 = Yes, they spent a day in mourning and confession
- Did they recognize that their sin had caused their destruction and exile?
Nehemiah 9:29-31 = Yes, but God in His mercy didn't destroy them as they deserved
- What did they decide to do in response to what they learned?
Nehemiah 9:38; 10:28-29 = They made a covenant to follow and obey God in everything

Scribes (*Ezra 7:10*)

- What was needed for the people to be able to follow and obey God in everything?
Ezra 7:10 = Someone who would study God's Word and teach it to them
- What group of people accepted responsibility for this?
Nehemiah 8:13 = Scribes - They became highly respected by the people
- Ecclesiasticus 39:1, 6, 8-9 (1-11): *He that gives his mind to the law of the Most High and meditates on it will seek out the wisdom of the ancients and be occupied with prophesies. ... If the great Lord is willing, he will be filled with the spirit of understanding; he will pour forth words of wisdom ... He will reveal instruction on his teaching and will glory in the law of the Lord's covenant. Many will praise his understanding.*
- Scribes interpreted God's written Law and how it should be applied to every situation of life
Developed 50 volumes of oral law (Mishnah), Equally binding as the written law

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Jesus and Scribes (*Mark 7:1-8*)

When do we first see Jesus interacting with scribes (teachers of the law)?

Luke 2:46-47 = Talking with them in the temple at the age of 12

How did Jesus feel about the scribes' work to clarify God's commands through their oral law?

Mark 7:6-8 = He condemned them for replacing God's commands with man-made traditions

What did Jesus recognize to be the motive behind the scribes' commitment to the law?

Mark 12:38-40 = To get praise from men

Scribes and Jesus (*Mark 3:22*)

How did the scribes feel about Jesus ignoring their oral law?

Mark 7:5 = It bothered them – a man of God should teach his disciples to follow traditions

What did some high-powered scribes from Jerusalem conclude about Jesus?

Mark 3:22 = That He was not from God, but was possessed by Satan

Did any scribes recognize Jesus as being from God?

Matthew 8:19 = Yes, some followed Him

Did Jesus accept any scribes as being faithful?

Mark 12:28-34 = Yes, He commended one for his understanding of God's Word

Pharisees (*Acts 26:5*)

What group dedicated themselves to strictly following scribal law?

Acts 26:5 (22:3; 23:6) = Pharisees – Paul was one, trained by one, son of one

Alexander the Great conquered the Mediterranean world and started the Hellenistic Age (300-200 BC)

Hellenism – The influence of Greek culture, philosophy, ethics and language

Hasidim (*the faithful ones*) – Jews in 2nd Century BC who opposed Hellenism

Fought under Mattathias and Judas Maccabeus to preserve the faith

1 Maccabees 2:42 – *Then a company of Hasidim came to him who were mighty warriors for Israel, every one who offered himself willingly for the law.*

Maccabean rulers claimed high priesthood and twisted Judaism to fit themselves

Essenes – Hasidim who separated themselves from Jewish society to remain pure

Qumran (location of Dead Sea Scrolls) appears to have been an Essene community

Pharisees – Hasidim who remained to influence Jewish society

Aramaic – *Perishaiya*, Greek – *Pharisaios* = Hebrew for *The Separated Ones*

Josephus – Jewish historian and Pharisee at end of 1st Century AD:

Around 6000 Pharisees & 4000 Essenes were around in Jesus' day

Pharisees were *extremely influential among the townsfolk; and all prayers and sacred rites of divine worship are performed according to their exposition.*

Pharisee Position

How did Pharisees feel about themselves?

Luke 18:11-12 = Very highly; Felt they were better than others

How did Pharisees feel about Jesus?

Matthew 12:1-2, 9-10, 13-14 = He was a threat to their traditions; they wanted to get rid of Him

How did Pharisees feel about Jews who accepted Jesus?

John 7:45-49 = They were stupid and ignorant of the law

How did Jesus feel about the righteousness of the Pharisees?

Matthew 5:20 = They weren't righteous enough to enter the kingdom of heaven

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Offensive Jesus (*Luke 5-6*)

What were some of the situations where Jesus offended the Pharisees?

Luke 5:20-21 = Jesus forgave sins – Only God could do this

Luke 5:29-30 = Jesus associated and ate with tax collectors and other horrible sinners

Luke 5:33 = Jesus and His disciples didn't fast regularly as prescribed

Luke 6:1-2 = Jesus' disciples "harvested grain" on the Sabbath

Luke 6:6-7, 10-11 = Jesus healed on the Sabbath

Matthew 15:1-2 = Jesus' disciples didn't follow the scribes' cleansing regulations (last week)

Silence the Lamb (*Matthew 22:15*)

What did the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders decide to do about Jesus?

Matthew 26:3-4 = Get rid of Him

Why did they have to be careful about this?

Matthew 21:46 (26:5) = Jesus was popular and people would stand up for Him

What did they do to try to reduce public support of Jesus?

Matthew 22:15 = They tried to discredit Him by trapping Him in His own words

How well did this tactic work?

Matthew 22:22, 46 (16-46) = It backfired when Jesus turned the tables on them, they gave up

A Sign for the Pharisees (*Matthew 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-13*)

How important was it to the Pharisees for them to get rid of Jesus?

Mark 3:6 = They plotted with their enemies – supporters of Herod – to get rid of Jesus

How had the Pharisees teamed with their Sadducee rivals against Jesus?

Matthew 16:1 = They asked Jesus for a sign from heaven to prove that He was from God

How did Jesus respond to their request?

Matthew 16:2-3 = Signs were meaningless because they wouldn't recognize them

A red sky at night is the shepherd's delight; A red sky in the morning is the shepherd's warning.

Would He give them a sign?

Matthew 16:4 (12:38-42) = Only the sign of Jonah – Jesus' resurrection

Pharisee Yeast (*Mark 8:14-21*)

How did Jesus make sure that His disciples weren't misled by the teachings of the Pharisees?

Mark 8:14-15 = He warned them to be on their guard against their bad teachings

Did the disciples understand what Jesus said?

Mark 8:16 = No, they thought He was reprimanding them for not bringing any bread along

How did Jesus respond to their confusion? = They had seen him feed multitudes twice with little

Mark 8:17-21 = He reprimanded their lack of faith & reminded them that He could provide

What else did Jesus say to help them understand?

Matthew 16:11-12 = He specifically explained that He meant to beware their bad teachings

Beware of the Pharisees (*Matthew 23:1-4*) = During Jesus' last week

Did Jesus offer any clearer warnings about the dangers of the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees?

Matthew 23:1-3 = Yes, Obey teachings from God's Word, but don't follow practices of tradition

Why shouldn't people follow their traditions just to be safe?

Matthew 23:4 = Too burdensome – Contrast with Jesus' light burden (Matthew 11:28-30)

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Praise to the Pharisees (*Matthew 23:5-12*)

- But the Pharisees looked righteous. Shouldn't their example be followed?
Matthew 23:5-7 = They were only putting on a show to win praise from men
Phylacteries – Small boxes worn on forehead and arm containing four verses:
Exodus 13:1-10; Exodus 13:11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Deuteronomy 11:13-21
Tassels – Reminders of God's commands (Numbers 15:37-41) = Made longer for show
What guidelines did Jesus offer to help us keep from seeking praise from men?
Matthew 23:8-10 = Don't seek out titles, Direct the titles and praise to God
How can we keep all of this in perspective for ourselves?
Matthew 23:11-12 = Humble ourselves and serve others

The Don't Beattitudes (*Matthew 23:13-36*) = Eight woes – all start the same except the third

- What had Jesus taught from the start of His ministry that contradicted the wisdom of the Pharisees?
Matthew 5:1-10 = Eight Beatitudes describing those who are blessed in God's kingdom
How does Jesus contrast the poor in spirit (humble) with the proud in spirit?
Matthew 5:3 – *Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*
Matthew 23:13 = The proud in spirit are shut out of the kingdom of heaven
How does Jesus contrast those who mourn with those who cause mourning?
Matthew 5:4 – *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*
Matthew 23:14 = Destroyers will be condemned and punished (v14 is NIV note)
How does Jesus contrast those who accept God's control with those who try to take control of God?
Matthew 5:5 – *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*
Matthew 23:15 = Those who convert others to legal traditions send them to hell
How does Jesus contrast those who seek after righteousness with those who seek after riches?
Matthew 5:6 – *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled*
Matthew 23:16-22 = Those who focus on worldly things will miss out on righteousness
How does Jesus contrast those who give mercy to those who withhold mercy?
Matthew 5:7 – *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*
Matthew 23:23-24 = Pharisees focused on details and forgot more important things of mercy...
How does Jesus contrast clean hearts with defiled hearts?
Matthew 5:8 – *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*
Matthew 23:25-28 = Pharisees' outward cleanliness hid unclean hearts and wickedness
How does Jesus contrast peacemakers and those persecuted with persecutors?
Matthew 5:9-10 – *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
Matthew 23:29-33 = Pharisees are liars and murderers – sons of the devil

Closing Prayer

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. Who are examples of righteousness to me?
(*Matthew 23:1-4, 13-15, 25-28; 1 Cor 11:1; 2 Cor 8:1-5; Phil 2:5-11; 3:17; 4:8-9; Hebrews 11*)
2. Am I an example of self-righteousness or God's righteousness?
(*Matthew 5:48; 23:5-7, 29-39; Luke 18:9-14; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10*)
3. How have I tried to add or change God's commands?
(*Matthew 5:17-20; 23:16-22; Mark 7:6-8; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Ecclesiastes 3:14*)
4. When have I been upset with others for not doing things my way?
(*Mark 7:1-5; Luke 5:27-32, 33-35; 6:1-2, 5-11; 1 Corinthians 10:23-33*)
5. What traditions have I permitted to interfere with my relationship with God?
(*Matthew 23:23-24; Mark 7:9-13; Isaiah 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-27; Colossians 2:6-23*)