

Oct 7th 2007: Mark's Gospel: Understanding the Pharisees: Mark 3:7-12

The reading we had from Mark 3.....

Is a summary of what we have seen happening...life of Jesus....up to this point

It shows us that: JESUS

- **has become so famous**...that when he preaches beside the ...He has to have a boat available
- **has healed so many**that sick people from everywhere
- **and** how He continues to reveal great power over all evil spirits

It also allows us to stop and consider.....a group that Mark has already mentioned several ...

A group of people that oppose Jesus with such a passion...that already they are planning His death

They are the Scribes and the Pharisees

In the society of that day.....a Scribe was a Pharisee.....who was particularly well versed interpretation of the law....**Torah.....and would both write down such interpretations -and give sound judgments over contested points of the law**

Both Pharisees who acted as Scribes.....and Pharisees who didn't.....**could teach**...synagogues
And they would then be called Rabbi.....which was simply Hebrew for Teacher

- **Jesus** gives us an insight into their way of dressing.....behaving when he spoke about them in **Mtt 23:1-7**....

This picture of a Pharisee.....shows him wearing two phylacteries.....(4 passages: Ex 13:1-10; 13:11-16; Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21)

He is also wearing a prayer shawl.....tassels

- The word Pharisee means.....separated.....

They traced their beginnings back to the 3rd C. BC

..to the time when.....The Greek Empire.....still ruled over.....power was on the wane

To increase control.....It decided to destroy the Judaistic culture.....**and replace** it with Greek

This process was called Hellenization

A high priest.....Jason was appointed by the Greek overlords.....**Gymnasium**....Greek clothes
Many of the Jewish aristocracy.....and the rich business people went along with this

However... among the ordinary people there was a strong reaction against
And a group arose called....**The Hasidim**....which means “godly” or “gracious” *Ha sid dim*

Eventually the Jews rose up against their Greek conquerors and took control
But there were still many....who wished to retain the Greek ways

And it was against such an influence that the Hasidim now made a stand
They separated themselves.....from all that was not according to the law of Moses.....
And became a strong political force against the Hellenist.....
And became known as PHARISEES

- **So right from the beginning.....**these Pharisees were not priests.....**BUT..**
Laymen deeply concerned about the survival of.....faith....
identity as God's chosen people

- **They knew....that God had sent the Jewish people...** into exile.....**allowed the Temple**
Because they worshipped idols.....and had not kept God's law

So they reasoned....that if they could persuade all Jews to observe the commands of the Torah
God would exalt them again as His people.....and would send His Messiah ...lead them to glory

- **These were ordinary men....**middle class.....who loved God.....and lived out His law
And the people respected them for their stand
They had a history of devotion to the Torah.....and spent hours seeking to understand it

In times of war.....it was the Pharisees....who risked their lives.....so as to protect precious scrolls
And in AD 90.....It was the Pharisees who determined what Hebrew Scriptures were truly inspired
And the result was what we call the Old Testament

By the time of Jesus.....about 6,000 Pharisees.....and they were passionate about 2 things

1. Teaching the young.....did this through the Synagogues
2. Living out the law themselves
.....and ensuring that their fellow Jews both understood....kept it

So effective were they.....That after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans....it was..
The Pharisaic expression of Judaism that survived.....and is still practiced today

That God used the Pharisees to prepare for the coming of Christ is undeniable

1. **They safeguarded the Old Testament Scriptures**
2. **They had a strong belief in the coming of a Messiah.....**And they popularized that belief amongst...so when Jesus came the people were already looking for the Messiah
3. **They made their belief in immortality and resurrection** as part of the accepted tenets of Judaism
4. **They took power from the Priests.....**who could only minister in the Temple....gave it to the laymanpreaching & teaching in the Synagogue

Unfortunately they had their problems too

Their position as a Pharisee or separated one.....convinced them.....better than others

They were proud.....arrogant.....judgmental.....hypocritical

They manipulated the law to their advantage

using it to set themselves....position of prominence...power

One commentator writes:

When God originally gave the law He did so as an act of supreme grace. People were in darkness, not knowing what God required. The law said: "This is my standard; if you live according to it, I will save you." The Pharisees seem to have taken the law and changed it from an act of grace into a great burden—"This is what you have got to do; if you fail, God will punish you; if you do not fail, then you are righteous enough so that God has to receive you." (Ralph Gower: Manners and Customs of Bible Times p258)

- **The way that the Pharisees changed it.....**was by adding to it their own interpretations
They started with the 613 commandments in the Torah.....but then over the years.....every law became enlarged upon.....and it was the enlarged version that had to be kept

The reason they did this was.....that they were so fearful about breaking God's laws...
becoming unclean

So if the Torah had a rule like: "Don't watch TV on Sundays," the Pharisees would expand the rule to "Don't watch TV ever.".....That made sure you would never break the initial rule

But then they would present their enlarged upon rule.....
as being God's rule.....and no one
.could live up to the strict rules they invented

- **So it was...**...that many of these predominantly godly.....dedicated people..... who so passionately believed in the coming Messiah.....--and had so much to give.....
Became dedicated enemies of Jesus

- **And it was not because they were bad people.....**
 They were good people who strongly believed in

- **Neither was it because they didn't know and trust the Scriptures**
 They treasured the Scriptures and worshipped the law of God

**But because they were so sure that they were right.....they ...on the whole.....
 Missed all the signs....that pointed to Jesus as the Messiah**

Praise God ...there were several exceptions.....Nicodemus was one

But on the whole...the Pharisees showed.....**That one** can be deeply religious
 Extremely dedicated.....But miss out on knowing Jesus as Saviour and Lord

- **We will meet the Pharisees** again and again....as we work our way through Mark's....
 And we need to allow each meeting.....to be a reminder to us....of the danger

Of putting the keeping of rulesabove a relationship with God through Jesus

- **The Pharisees show us.....**that by our own works.....we will never please
God
Or really know His love.....forgiveness.....and Grace

**But when we accept our sinfulness.....our weaknesses....our need of His help.....
 He pours out on us His love.....and through the sacrifice.....makes us His own**