

Sunday School Lesson
The Whited Sepulchre Syndrome

Matthew 21

23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, *“By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?”*

24 And **Jesus** answered and said unto them, *“I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.*

25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?” And they reasoned with themselves, saying, *“If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?”*

26 But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.”

27 And they answered **Jesus**, and said, *We cannot tell.* And he said unto them, *Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.*

28 But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.

29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.

30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.

31 Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, *The first.* **Jesus** saith unto them, *Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*

32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

Q: What would Jesus have answered them IF they had picked one or the other?

WHY WERE THEY ASKING? - The pharisee's 1st line of defense is to pick out hypocrisy in someone else. You see, as a pharisee, if you can trip someone else up in their own words, anything said prior by that person is now NULL and VOID.

It may at first appear that Jesus was simply getting out of their trap. That He was merely side-stepping their question with another question...

What if... the question really WAS the answer?

By asking the counter-question He put forth, He was revealing to the pharisee heart WHY they were not fit or ready to receive the answer to their own question.

Jesus put forth, really, the question they struggled with on the inside:

“Why DIDN’T the pharisee believe what John was teaching? - What was it that John was teaching that they were having such a problem with?”

Matthew 3

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the

wrath to come?

8 Bring forth therefore **fruits meet for repentance**:

9 And think not to say **within yourselves**, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

10 And now also the **axe** is laid unto **the root of the trees**: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

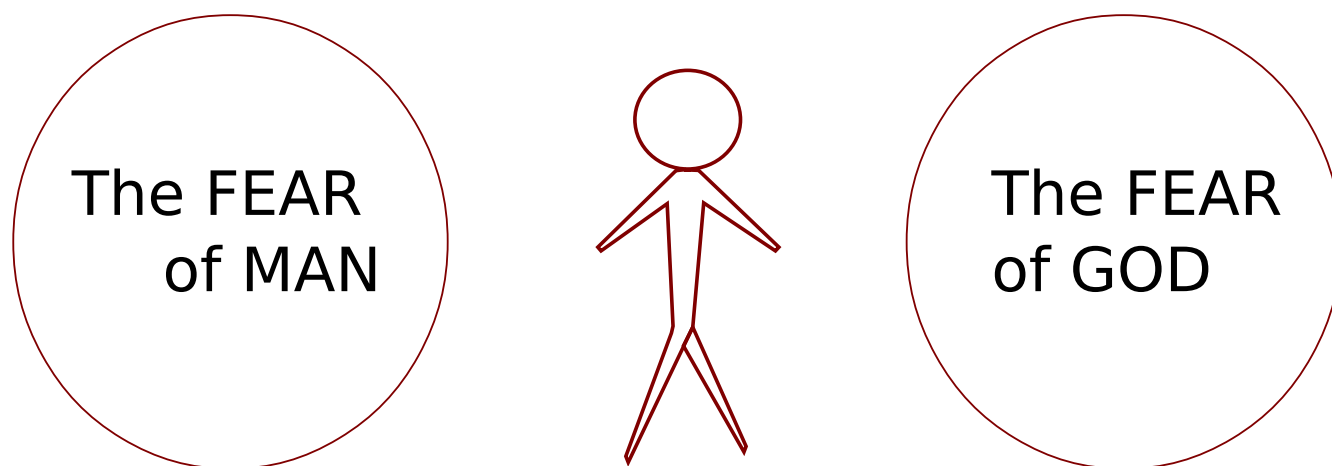
11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The pharisee's were pressed by John's rough preaching. Surely the truth of John's message was like a sharp axe... not hitting the tree at it's exterior trunk, nor swing at the outward leaves shading fellow man and blocking out the sight of the sun...
... but right at it's very root.

It's no secret that the Pharisees are a people filled with exterior and outward fruit. But the fruit of the flesh is a far cry from the internal fruit of the spirit. For the fruit of the flesh is sown in corruption.

WAS THE MESSAGE OF JOHN OF GOD, or of men?



I'd like to put forth today the '**Whited Sepulchre Syndrome**'.

The Pharisee is a person earmarked by being caught between two pressures... and is under the constant habit of caving to the first.

But, Jesus, who is the WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE... does not leave us without a solution to the problem. He never leaves us without an answer.

He expounds His point with an immediate parable:

28 *But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.*

29 *He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.*

30 *And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.*

31 *Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*

32 *For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.*

It's obvious that several things stand out about this story.

The pharisee SAYS he obeys God's Will... but for the fear of man, seeks his own will.
... notice, John's message was pretty clear. It's the WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. Repentance.
... and the pharisee rejects because of who else is going forward.

WHAT IS A PHARISEE?

(This list might surprise you. I know it convicted me.)

QUOTE: "I think we hear the word 'pharisee' and think it synonymous with 'hypocrite', and instantly reject the idea of this title applying to us. After all, we're EARNEST in what we do. So we seek someone else to pin this on.

... But HYPOCRISY is only one aspect of a pharisee. Many hypocrites do not set themselves aside to follow the laws of God, yet the pharisee does.

LET ME UNLOCK A WHOLE PORTION OF THE BIBLE THAT YOU'VE BARRED YOURSELF FROM:

... **CONSIDER** that you COULD, INDEED, be a *fool*. A *scorner*. *Simple*. And a *pharisee*.

Flattering titles, certainly not.

But perhaps this is exactly why HUMILITY and BECOMING AS A LITTLE CHILD is so key to learning and benefiting from truth.

Let's do a simple thought experiment:

Cooks = Cook

Printers = Print

Drivers = Drive

Robbers = Rob (steal)

Liars = Lie

Fools = Do foolish things

Can you admit that you do foolish things?

NOW when you read the Proverbs, the cautions to the SIMPLE and to the FOOL and to the SCORNER can apply to you! And when we read passages pertaining to Pharisee's, Don't leave yourself out.

IMAGINE IF YOU WERE THERE:

Matthew 23

29 Woe unto you, **scribes** and **Pharisees**, hypocrites! because ye **build** the **tombs** of the prophets, and **garnish** the **sepulchres** of the righteous,

30 And say, *If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.*

Let's face it. Ask yourself, "If I were alive in the Bible days, and hung around the temple rulers, would I have wanted to crucify Jesus, too?"

NO! You'd have fallen like the rest because you would not have had been privy to the examples God recorded in the Bible.

QUOTE: "No hindsight – no foresight."

A PHARISEE – Pharisaioi – A Separatist. Exclusively religious.

CHARACTERISTICS:

- Covetous (Luke 16)
- Justified themselves before men.
- Tithed faithfully w/o Mercy, Judgment, and Faith
- Exterior clean
- Interior – Extortion (manipulating/using others)
- Interior – Excess (self-indulgence)
- Exterior – Show/Display
- Interior – Dead (like old bones)
- Self-rightously believed they would have somehow would not have stumbled or struggled in the manner of their ancestors
- ... Especially concerning the early persecution of the prophets.

ILL – *We get this idea that the prophets roamed around and everyone listened to these controversial messages and were, like, 'Ok. Thanks for the warning.'* Early prophets were severely mistreated. Thrown into mire and dungeons, executed, locked up in towers and prisons, driven out of town, laughed and mocked to scorn... *If it doesn't fly in a civilized society revolving around 'free speech' today, what makes you think it was just peachy back in Bible times?!?*

- Thinking in their heart, instead of outwardly
- Fasted often
- Heard, but did not heed, the messages of John
- Traditions (*fear of men*) took precedents over God's Word (*fear of God*)
--- Culture dictated how much of God's Word must be adhered to.
- Sat in the proverbial 'seat of Moses', ruling over the affairs of others
- Prayed for people without looking for ways to help them
- Pharisees attempt to catch someone else in their words to circumvent conviction

In **Luke 5**, when Jesus healed the lame man who was lowered through the roof, the Pharisee's sat and watched... and then reasoned away what they saw... offended that Jesus believed He had the power to forgive sins.

'No one can forgive sins but God.'

... However a pharisee struggles the most with the concept of forgiveness.

... If sin cannot be forgiven except by appeasing God (*via working them off*), then why should approaching the reproachments of my fellow man be any different?

HOW IS IT THAT, like Paul, we readily admit that we are 'chiefest of sinners' but we certainly aren't no pharisee!

Do you SAY and DO NOT?

‘Hello, fellow Pharisee.’ :-)

Is there any hope for a hypocrite or a pharisee?

We should turn to Nicodemus and ask:

John 3 – Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, inquiring of Christ’s doctrine, and in general, to learn more. Jesus very clearly explains to Nicodemus that he must needs be born again. Not of water (natural birth) but of SPIRIT. It is not on the outside that a pharisee has his troubles. They begin on the INSIDE.

Only a new birth of the Spirit can fix them. HOW? Repent and believe.

- v.19-21 – THIS is the condemnation. (*Oh pharisees and anyone else who will not repent*) That light is come into the world, but men love their darkness rather than light. The light is a horrid, controversial, and terrible thing, because it exposes our deeds (*we see as good or bad*) for what they all are... corruption of the flesh, and worthy to be reproved.

John 7:50 – During the cuffuffle in the temple on the last day of the feast, the religious rulers have had quite enough of Jesus:

- v.13-32 – Jesus points out that the rulers cannot keep the law of Moses themselves, but they insist that everyone else do so. They break the sabbath by circumcising on the sabbath, trying to keep the law!
- v.41-44 – There is a doctrinal dispute of Jesus’ pedigree and where He was from – If He was from **Galilee**, (*Where NOTHING good comes from*) then how come His birth cert. Reads **Bethlehem, the City of David?**

NOTE: *Forget the presidency! How about explaining away your physical city of birth if you are claiming to be from Heaven and claiming to be the Lamb of God?!?*

- v.44-52 – Nicodemus speaks up, out of his league, putting his neck out for Jesus. He is quickly shut down by his peers, but the fact remains that Jesus took special note of Nicodemus’ interjection and it is forever recorded in the Scriptures where a great many people are not named next to their comments.
- Did Nicodemus change? – evidence of peacemaker, encouraging peers to listen and heed.

John 19:39 – Nicodemus brings the mixture of myrrh and aloes... ONE HUNDRED POUNDS of it! Does this amount seem out of proportion?!?

... Get this:

“There were different process of embalming, varying according to the means at the disposal of the family of the deceased. The most expensive (*and doubtless the mode by which Jacob and Joseph were embalmed*) is estimated to have cost what would be equivalent to **\$32,813.28** of our money in 2018!

“Preparatory to this process, the brain was removed by means of a crooked wire inserted through the nose. An incision was then made in the left side of the abdomen with a stone knife, use of metal not being permitted. Through this incision the viscera were drawn. With the exception of the heart and kidneys. They were sometimes replaced after being prepared for preservation, and in other instances were put into vases.

“After the removal of the viscera the body was carefully washed externally with water, and internally with palm-wine, oil of cedar, and other antiseptic preparations. The cavities of the head and abdomen were filled with myrrh, cassia, cinnamon, and other aromatic substances, and the incision in the abdomen were sewed up.

“The body was then steeped in a strong infusion of niter. The time occupied by this steeping process is variously stated. (*Could be 30-days, 40-days, even 70-days*) It may have varied at different periods of Egyptian history, or in different parts of the land at the same time. Some have supposed that forty days were allowed for the embalming proper, and thirty days for the steeping in niter.

“When this process was completed, the body and limbs were carefully wrapped in bandages of fine linen, plastered on with the underside with gum. These bandages were seven or eight inches in width, and were sometimes to have been in some way subjected to extreme heat, (*because they contained ASBESTOS*) Precisely how is not known. Some have conjectured that it was soaked in pitch, boiling hot; others that it was put into a stove or oven. That extreme heat was applied in some way is evident from the charred bandages and from the appearance of the bones.

You can continue to read about how the hard-lime encrusted cast was made as form fitting as possible to the Egyptian body, and then removed to be decorated and painted to look as close to the resemblance of the deceased as possible/fashionable. Then was buried in a coffin made of sycamore or cedar. Then encased in another, larger wooden coffin... which was then encased in a stone vault.

In 1837, it was not apparent WHY the Egyptians embalmed their dead. It was speculated that it either had to do with the preservation of the body believed to have an effect on the preservation of the soul in the afterlife... or the belief that one day the soul might return to the body, and need it again.

This much is certain... when Nicodemus came to assist in the burial of Jesus, **Nicodemus was 100% certain of the burial process.** And when Jesus rose again from the dead, it was beyond words amazing to an ex-pharisee who, I believe, became a believer!