

I'M NOT A PHARISEE...OR AM I?

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of October this year, I challenged this church to read through the 4 books of the Gospel over the last 3 months of the year. I personally have done it and have been awestruck as I read the teachings of Jesus. They are powerful and often thought-provoking. In many ways they are a wake-up call and they certainly stirred up in me a desire to walk in line with what Jesus taught.

Jesus made it very clear that hearing and doing what He taught would be good for us.

Matthew 7:24-27 (NKJV) "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

We want to build our lives on the Rock, Jesus, and on His teachings, which will give us a solid foundation. I plan to do a number of messages on the teachings of Jesus, and today I will begin with what He had to say to the Pharisees whose faith He confronted many times.

MESSAGE

A RIGHEOUSNESS TO BE EXCEEDED

Matthew 5:20 (NKJV) For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Pharisees and scribes were the religious leaders of the day. They knew the Torah well. They had studied it and were experts regarding the Law. How is it possible to be more righteous than them?

Well, Jesus had a problem with them.

- Three times in the book of Matthew, Jesus calls them "a brood of vipers".
- He calls them whitewashed tombs: **Matthew 23:27** "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.
- Eight times in the book of Matthew, Jesus calls them "Hypocrites".
- He accuses them of being the Blind leading the blind.

The reason is this: **Matthew 15:8** (NKJV) `These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honour Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.

They were hypocrites. They were self-righteous. They thought that they were better than others. They led people to the traditions of man and made man's traditions and rules of more importance than true religion which changes us from the inside.

So, their righteousness, it appears fell short of the expectation of Jesus!

But, can we honestly say that our righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees?

THE COOKIE THIEF

Here's a story that illustrates our challenge quite well...

A woman was waiting at an airport one night, with several long hours before her flight. She hunted for a book in the airport shops, bought a bag of cookies and found a place to sit, read her book and eat some of her cookies.

She was engrossed in her book but happened to see, that the man sitting beside her, as bold as could be. . .grabbed a cookie or two from her bag, which she tried to ignore to avoid a scene.

So she munched the cookies and watched the clock, as the gutsy cookie thief diminished her stock. She was getting more irritated as the minutes ticked by, thinking, "If I wasn't so nice, I would blacken his eye."

With each cookie she took, he took one too, when only one was left, she wondered what he would do. With a smile on his face, and a nervous laugh, he took the last cookie and broke it in half.

He offered her half, as he ate the other, she snatched it from him and thought... "eish, some people". This guy has some nerve and he's also rude, why he didn't even show any gratitude!

She could not think of a time when she had been so infuriated and sighed with relief when her flight was called. She gathered her belongings and headed to the gate, refusing to look back at the ungrateful cookie thief.

She boarded the plane, and sank in her seat, then she sought her book, which was almost complete. As she reached in her baggage, she gasped with surprise, there was her bag of cookies, in front of her eyes.

If mine are here, she moaned in despair, the others were his, and he tried to share. Too late to apologize, she realised with grief, that she was the rude one, the ungrateful one and the thief.

She was the one who had been indignant and acted like a Pharisee and the man who had permitted her to do so had been patient and kind!

Has that possibly happened to us? When we thought we were in the right, but we were actually in the wrong? That's the problem with self-righteousness!

THE PROBLEM WITH SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

Luke 20:46 ""Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts".

Self-righteousness is all about "ME", its about looking good in our own eyes and in the eyes of the people around us. It's about wrong motives – serving God with our lips but denying Him with our heart. It's got nothing to do with being righteous before God and living for His glory!

Are we looking for recognition and self-glory?

Do we think we're better than others?

Are our motives all about God's kingdom?

Do we need to deal with the problem of self-righteousness?

EXAMPLES OF JESUS ENCOUNTERS WITH THE PHARISEES & SCRIBES

There are several examples we can learn from in Jesus ministry, but because of time, I will only use two.

God desires mercy!

Matthew 9:9-13 (NKJV) As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. 10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

The Pharisees judged "sinners" and they judged "Jesus". Jesus taught specifically that we should not judge because with the same measure with which we judge, we will be judged.

- The tax collectors were outcasts, they were dishonest and corrupt.
- The sinners were sinners, they had sinned against God and man.
- And Jesus sat with them – why? Because they needed salvation.

Our God desires that we walk in mercy so that “sinners” can be drawn to Him and be saved. Those who are sick need a doctor, not those who are well.

But the Pharisees needed Jesus just as badly! He pointed out their sin. They were self-righteous and their sin was lack of mercy! They were NOT walking in love for their neighbor.

Matthew 15:1-9 (NKJV) Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, 2 “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” 3 He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, saying, ‘Honour your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ 5 But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God”— 6 then he need not honour his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. 7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 8 ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ”

- The Pharisees and scribes knew what God had said in the Law.
- But they altered it to suit themselves.
- They placed their traditions above the word of God.
- They looked good externally, but they were rotten on the inside.

Are there areas in our lives where we have made God’s word of private interpretation for our own benefit?

SOME EXAMPLES OF SELF-RIGHTEOUS BEHAVIOUR IN OUR TIME

It’s time to bring this message home. Do you think that our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees? Let me give you some examples of where we are missing it!

- Some people in the church have a problem when someone else in the congregation comes forward week after week for ministry. Yet, Jesus said he didn’t come for the righteous. He also said that unless we become like children, we shall by no means enter the kingdom of God. Some people grow slower than others, but when we have a problem with them we don’t realise the problem in our own lives... Jesus said, “judge not!”
- Others have something to say when someone comes to church dressed straggly or possibly even not smelling good.
- What did Jesus say? **Luke 11:39-41** (NKJV) Then the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. 40 Foolish ones! Did not He

who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you.

- Instead of sitting in our chairs of self-righteousness in church and having some negative comment about those who are poorer than us, when last did we give alms (in other words take something of ours and give it) to others. When last did we try to help those who have needs?
- What if we don't have and the Lord prompts us to sell something so that we do have?
- Some seem to find fault with others in the church, or even display racial attitudes. Do you know what Jesus said? **Matthew 7:4-5** Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye

CONCLUSION

Luke 12:1 (NKJV) In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy".

Church, today it remains necessary to "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy". It's not good for us and it threatens our very eternity!

Our church has the following core values:

- All are welcome - "Love your neighbour as yourself" – we are not exclusive nor judgmental.
- Come as you are, but don't stay that way.
- Real people – airs and graces are not for us.
- Free people, free people.
- Disciples making disciples.
- Community impact – irresistible influence.
- Generosity - "There was not a need among them" & "they shared".
- A sense of family – "Oikos".
- Strong focus on uncompromised Bible based teaching.

None of these core values can be achieved if we are hypocrites, living in our own form of religion, but not in a manner that pleases God.

Let's come back to the teachings of Jesus, realising that we are not perfect. We need the One who came for those who are sick, those who need saving. We are no better than others but we can be genuinely righteous, with our righteousness exceeding that of the Pharisees. Let us begin today!