

Middle School Sunday School Lessons by



Year 3: Session 5 – Jesus and the Pharisees

Class 13: Mark 3:1-6 – The Pharisees do not approve of a healing by Jesus

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Introduction to the Pharisees
- Compare Jesus' understanding of healing (offer help) with the Pharisees' understanding of healing ("follow the rules").
- Highlight the benefits of Jesus' understanding of healing.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Movie clip (from rfour.org)
- TV and equipment needed to play movie clip
- Paper and writing utensils for each student
- Scatcategory-type list to be printed out (included in lesson) – one per person
- Timer (for 3 minutes)

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- For the opening question for today's class, one of the teachers will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer; the teacher asking the question will answer first.
- Once the teacher answers the question, we'll go around the circle.
- When it's your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- Here's this week's question: *When you have been sick, what is one thing that someone has done to help you feel or get better?*

INTRO

- This week we start a new session of stories about Jesus and the Pharisees.
- The Pharisees are one of the three groups that surround Jesus.
- Do you remember all three groups that surround Jesus (the crowd, the Pharisees and the disciples)
- And as we've discussed in the Jesus and the Crowd classes, each of these three groups have certain characteristics.

- The crowd, as we've seen, tends to be demanding (wants more time/healing from Jesus than Jesus can provide). It can also be persnickety (loves Jesus and then tries to throw Jesus off a cliff). And it is often absent-minded (unaware) and therefore not synchronized with Jesus.
- The Pharisees on the other hand are very focused. On rules. And here's why:

SUMMARY BACKGROUND on the Pharisees

- The Pharisees are part of the religious (and somewhat political) ruling body of the Israelites, called the Sanhedrin. Led by the High Priest, the Pharisees and Sadducees were the main participants in it. Remember, Israel is under Roman rule, but the Romans allowed local leaders to retain some control. There was also a king of Israel – King Herod – but he did not have much influence over the religious rules/expectations of the people.
- As religious leaders, they enforced their religious rules the best they could – most of these rules originated from what we call the Old Testament, but over the years, more rules were added on.
- The Pharisees, in general, believed that the way to get God to pay attention to them/to the Israelites was by following the rules from God perfectly. This is how they understood salvation: Do everything right and then God's favor and grace would be yours.
- The converse of this understanding is that if bad things happened to you, then it was your fault for not following the rules closely enough.
- Sadly, these types of beliefs are pretty prevalent in how Christians still think today. Which is too bad since Jesus is obviously not in agreement with the Pharisees about these understandings re: rules and God.

For more information about the Pharisees, here's one decent source:

<http://followtherabbi.com/world/encyclopedia/article/the-four-views-of-judaism>

TRANSITION to Movie Clip

- So, in short, the rules were very important to the Pharisees.
- As we'll see in our next few stories, this understanding of the rules (and how they related to sickness and healing) clashed with Jesus' understanding of healing
- The movie clip we're going to watch (from *Patch Adams*) is about a clash between rules and healing as well.
- It takes place in a courtroom where a medical school board is disapproving of a medical student's (who is an older student, played by Robin Williams) personal understanding of medicine.
- Listen at the beginning for what the student is accused of. Then listen for the student's response (which is most of the clip)

WATCH CLIP

ASK

- What is the student accused of? (practicing medicine/treating patients without a license; running a medical clinic without proper licensing)
- Robin Williams' character says, "[My patients] are also doctors. I use that term broadly, gentlemen, but isn't a doctor just someone who helps someone else?" Do you agree with this statement or disagree? Why?

TELL

- So the differing viewpoints that were just shared in our own conversation about what exactly makes a doctor a doctor helps us to see how rules can be a helpful thing, but can also limit the effectiveness of how a person might be able to help another person.
- Robin Williams' character summarizes this tension between rules and helping someone when he says, "If we're going to fight a disease, let's fight one of the most terrible diseases of all: Indifference." He then goes on to say how the rules for being a doctor keeps the doctor too far away from the patient and makes the doctor indifferent to the patient.
- In today's scripture story, Jesus heals someone.
- And then, just like in our movie clip, the ruling body, the Pharisees, do not approve of this healing.
- Let's see what happens.

READ Mark 3:1-6 (recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse)

1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. **2** They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. **3** And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." **4** Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. **5** He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. **6** The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

ASK (answers are in parenthesis)

- So what just happened? (Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees were so against this break in the rules that they plotted to destroy Jesus)
- Verse 1 – who is the "he" who entered the synagogue? (Jesus)
- Verse 2 – who is the "they" who watched him (the Pharisees)
- Verse 2 – and what reason does verse 2 give for why the Pharisees are watching Jesus? (So that they can accuse him)
- Verse 4 – Jesus addresses the Pharisees – because knows what they are thinking. Have we seen Jesus do this before? (Yes! In our previous lesson with the paralytic man [Mark 2]).
- Verse 4 – How would *you* answer Jesus' question? (Here's the question: *Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?*)
- Verse 4 – So how did the Pharisees answer Jesus' question? (they don't)
- Verse 5 – does it surprise you that Jesus is angry/gets angry?
- Verse 5 – So, what does Jesus do on the Sabbath? (He heals the man.)
- Verse 6 – And how do the Pharisees respond to Jesus healing someone on the Sabbath? (They make plans to kill him.)
- One of the 10 commandments is "You shall not murder." Are the Pharisees keeping to their own rules? (They are working their way towards breaking it...)
 - What do you think about that?

TELL

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- Sidenote (if needed): The “Herodians” are advisers and supporters of King Herod. King Herod is the “King” of the Israelites.
- Doing work on the Sabbath is against the Israelites rules.
- Healing a man of the Sabbath is considered by the Pharisees to be “working on the Sabbath.”
- Thinking about the movie clip, we see that Jesus understands/believes/acts in ways that are similar to the Robin Williams’ character: Healing someone should not be restricted by rules.
- The reason that Jesus does this, though, is not just to break rules, but because Jesus prays. And it is what he hears and understands in his prayer time that informs his actions. Jesus is answering to a higher power than religious rules
- If we look at this argument from the perspective of the man with the withered hand, he probably appreciates the Jesus/God/Robin Williams approach much better.
- The Pharisees, though, think that breaking the rules (like doing work on the Sabbath) will lead to God’s disfavor. Bad things will happen if the rules are broken.
- Because the Pharisees are focused on the rules, they are then indifferent to the man’s condition and to his healing.
- Although we see a parallel reaction where Jesus gets mad at the Pharisees and the Pharisees get mad at Jesus – there’s only one side that plots to kill the other side – and that’s a strong and important clue that the Pharisees beliefs are incorrect/inferior.
 - If you have to break your rules in order to protect your rules (i.e. the Pharisees are so concerned about their rules, that they are willing to kill Jesus to protect their rules), then your rules aren’t as good as you think they are.
 - The other problem for the Pharisees, as they hold on to their religious laws, is that it gives them a certainty that keeps them from actually listening for God and God’s direction (they don’t need to be like Samuel, or Elijah or Jesus who spend time in prayer because they have their rules to tell them what to do)
 - And because the Pharisees believe that following the rules leads to salvation, then it’s almost impossible for them to see how they might be off-course and need to *repent* (do you remember what “repent” means from previous classes? That’s right: *To turn around/change course*). This is one reason why the Pharisees just keep going their own way, which eventually *does* lead to killing Jesus.

TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY

- In the story, there are two opposing viewpoints:
 - 1. The Pharisees believe that certain rules need to be followed no matter what the cost to an individual.
 - 2. Jesus is a pray-er who then acts on what he heard/understood in his prayer time. This action often runs counter to the religious rules that the Pharisees enforce.
- The activity is a simple one today.
- We’re going to play a board game and see if it works better if we play by the rules or if it works better if we break a rule.

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- We’re going to play a board game that’s a lot like Scattergories.
- How this works is that we’re given 12 questions that we must give an answer to. Any number of words in the answer is allowed, HOWEVER the first word must start with the correct/assigned letter for that round.

- We'll have three minutes for each round to think of answers and write them down
- So we'll play two or three rounds (depending on time) and keep score for each round – competing against each other.
- [Unbeknownst to the class, one of the teachers will keep track of the class' score as though the class were one contestant. In other words, if one student gets an answer to #1, then the class gets one point. If 12 students get a correct answer for #2, then the class gets one point for #2. The only time the class will not get a point is if ALL students fail to give an answer for a question – a rarity, but also possible. After all the points are totaled and the game is finished, compare the class' score to the individual scores. At the very worst, the class as a single participant will tie the highest single scorer.]

DO SCATTERGORIES ACTIVITY (see list of questions at the end of lesson)

- If you have a scattergories die – you could bring it to class and roll it.
- Otherwise, just pick a letter for each round. For instance:

Round 1: All answers must start with "S"

Round 2: All answers must start with "L"

Round 3: All answers must start with "E"

ASK/TELL

- So who won?
- I have a secret to tell you, while we were doing scores, I kept track of the scores for the class. (explain how the scoring worked).
- So what is your prediction? Do you think the class received a higher score than our winner?
- [show score – let the class decide]
- So this was a little bit of a rigged competition, but the idea here is to help us see how much better it is for us when we work together and help each other out.

CLOSING PRAYER

NOTE: For the Scattergories list to print out and pass out (one per person in the class) **see next page**

Categories

Round 1

Round 2

Round 3

1. Fruits

2. School subjects

3. Musical Instruments

4. Cartoon characters

5. Clothing

6. School supplies

7. Things that are hot

8. Colors

9. Tools

10. Breakfast foods

11. Fish

12. Things with tails
