

Middle School Sunday School Lessons by

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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

- Some way to play and show movie clip on rfour.org site for this lesson (from *Patch Adams*)
- Paper and writing utensils for each student
- *Scattegories*-type list to be printed out (included at end of 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

- There are three main groups that surround Jesus during his ministry -- (the crowd, the Pharisees and the disciples)
- Last session, we talked about the characteristics of the crowd (demanding, change moods quickly, curious for entertainment reasons more so than wanting to be like Jesus which leads to the crowd not being in-sync with Jesus and tending to get in the way).
- This week, we start a new session of stories, where we'll be looking at the interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees, as well as the characteristics of the Pharisees.

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- The first thing we're going to look at is how the Pharisees are very focused on the rules. And here's a little background on 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, the Pharisees were the enforcers of the religious rules from their faith stories (that we find in the Hebrew or Old Testament), but over the years, more rules were added.
- The Pharisees, in general, believed that it was very important to perfectly follow the rules about God. Because, if everyone did everything right, then God's favor and grace would be bestowed upon the people.
- That doesn't sound so bad, does it? However, if you look at this thinking through the negatives, that's where you start to see how harsh of a belief system this really is.
- In other words, if good things happen to you if you follow the rules perfectly, what then does it mean if bad things happen to you?
 - It means you or someone close to you must not have followed the rules correctly
- Or put another way, everything bad that happened to was your fault – which doesn't leave much room for compassion or mercy or grace, does it?
- Sadly, these type of thinking can still be found in some Christian circles.
- Which is too bad since Jesus is obviously not in agreement with the Pharisees about these understandings re: rules and God.

Note for teachers: 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 especially how they related to sickness and healing) clashed with Jesus' understanding of sharing God's healing and mercy.
- To help us start thinking about how there could be more than one perspective about healing (healing is good, right?) let's watch a movie clip from *Patch Adams*
- The clip is from the end of the movie where a student, Patch Adams (played by Robin Williams) is in on trial in front of the school's medical board who is disapproving of the way Patch practices medicine.
- Listen closely at the beginning of the clip 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?
- What do you think -- is the board interested in healing others? (seems like they are, but only in a certain way)

TELL

- So the differing viewpoints that were just shared in our own conversation and in the movie clip about what exactly makes a doctor a doctor helps us think about 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, we will see something similar happen.
- We'll see Jesus heal 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)

- Is there anything you find interesting or weird about this story? [*to teachers: You don't necessarily need to answer what they notice or have questions about – sometimes just agree with a, "yep, that's interesting" or a, "Yeah, I find that to be weird, too" works*]
- 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 he knows what they are thinking. Have we seen Jesus do this before with the Pharisees? (Yes! In our previous lesson with the paralytic man [Mark 2]).
- Verse 4 – How would *you* answer Jesus' question? (Jesus' question: *Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?*)
- Verse 4 – And, 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 decide to do with the man? (He heals the man, on the Sabbath, in the synagogue in front of the Pharisees, after challenging the Pharisees in front of all the people there – whoa!)
- 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

- Sidenote (if needed): The “Herodians” are advisers and supporters of King Herod. King Herod is the “King” of the Israelites.
- A little background about the Sabbath: Doing work on the Sabbath was (and still is) against the Jewish religious rules.
- Healing a man on the Sabbath, then, was 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. Jesus isn’t just trying to be a rebel.
- Instead, we see that Jesus prays regularly. And it is what he hears and understands in his prayer time that informs his actions and his understandings of the Jewish rules.
- In other words, 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

- The Pharisees think the rules are very important. But are those rules helpful in this instance? Doesn’t seem like it.
- So, although Jesus’ actions in today’s story break a religious rule, a person benefited from Jesus’ decision to do so.

- To help us think about how sometimes “breaking the rules” can benefit more people, let’s do the following activity.
- 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 one of the rules.

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.

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”

- *[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.]*

ASK/TELL

- So who won?
- Now, I have a secret to tell you: While we were doing scores, I kept track of the scores for the whole class (explain how the scoring worked).
- So what is your prediction? Do you think the class received a higher score than our winner?
- [show the class score and let the class decide]
- So this was a little bit of a rigged competition, but the idea here is to help us see how it was better for us as a group when we worked together and helped each other out – even when it broke the rules.
- However, I do want to be clear that the idea here isn’t that Jesus is rule-breaker and so you should be, too.
- Instead, what we keep seeing in the stories is that Jesus’ actions and choices are informed by his prayer life
- In this situation it seems pretty clear to Jesus (and to us, too, I think) that the better choice is to break the rule than blind obedience to the rule.
- And the fact that the man was healed suggests that God was in agreement with Jesus’ choice as well.

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
