

Jesus and the Pharisees

Background

Who were the Pharisees?

- A sect of Jewish religious leaders who had a lot of influence with the common people (in contrast to the more upper class Sadducees.)
- They had an "oral torah". A collection of traditions (later written down around 200 AD) which added to and embellished the commands of the written torah. They were very strict, severe, legalistic, hypocritical and self-righteous.

What was the Sabbath?

- God commanded that the seventh day of the week (Saturday) should be a day of rest, when work ceases.
- The Pharisees and their tradition took a very strict view of what was considered "work".

Outline

- VV1-21 The Pharisees and the Sabbath
 - VV1-8 The Pharisees confront Jesus about eating in the grainfields on the Sabbath
 - VV9-14 The Pharisees confront Jesus about healing on the Sabbath. They plot to destroy him.
 - VV15-21 Jesus withdraws and continues his ministry instead of confronts, fulfilling prophecy.
- VV22-45 The Pharisees and Exorcisms
 - VV22-37 Jesus demonstrates his power
 - VV22-32 The Pharisees confront Jesus about casting out devils, accusing him of being an agent of Satan.
 - VV33-37 Jesus condemns the Pharisees
 - VV38-42 The Pharisees ask a sign
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- VV46-50 Jesus' spiritual family

Notes

VV1-21 The Pharisees and the Sabbath

VV1-8 The Pharisees confront Jesus about eating in the grainfields on the Sabbath

- Notice that the Pharisees question the disciples. Jesus has been preparing them to suffer persecution in his name.
- Jesus implies that he is "greater than David" and states that he is "greater than the temple". If David was right to take the bread, and the priests are allowed to do it, then how much more the "Son of Man"
- Jesus demonstrates the use of wisdom in applying the law. He sees the hunger of the disciples, and prioritises mercy for them instead of rigid legalism.

VV9-14 The Pharisees confront Jesus about healing on the Sabbath. They plot to destroy him.

- Jesus indirectly criticises the inconsistency of the oral traditions. Their traditions allowed the rescue of an animal on the Sabbath, but not the healing of a man.
- Jesus goes beyond criticising the oral torah, to again assert his authority over the written torah. He places his "oral torah" against that of the Pharisees - "It is lawful..."

VV15-21 Jesus withdraws and continues his ministry instead of confronts, fulfilling prophecy.

- Jesus has a mission to fulfil. He knows his time to be delivered is not yet, so he steps away from controversy for the time-being... but the opposition will follow him.

VV22-45 The Pharisees and Exorcisms

VV22-37 Jesus demonstrates his power

VV22-29 The Pharisees confront Jesus about casting out devils, accusing him of being an agent of Satan.

- The Pharisees try to make an excuse to reject the evidence in front of them. Their accusation is petty, just like in the parable of the children refusing to play in ch. 11
- But Jesus deconstructs their argument. It does not make sense. Why would Satan undermine his own influence? And if Jesus is using the power of Satan, then what about the other Jewish people who are (trying) to cast out devils?
- But the truth is that Jesus power demonstrates conclusively that the kingdom of God is present.

VV30-37 Jesus condemns the Pharisees

- The Pharisees have made up an excuse for accusing Jesus, but Jesus does not let them off the hook lightly.
- They have made a very serious accusation. They have rejected the unambiguous display of God's power and written it off as Satan's. How can such rejection of truth be forgiven?
- Jesus challenges the crowds to assess the Pharisees' words by their lives.
- We ought to take great care even with our careless words.

VV38-42 The Pharisees ask a sign

- The Pharisees are again careless. They have rejected the powerful witness of Jesus' miracles. There is one greater miracle to witness, the resurrection of Jesus. But sadly, many of them will reject this also.

VV43-45 The Parable of the unclean spirits

- A commentary on the shallow reception the people have shown Jesus. They have accepted healing and the casting out of demons. But will they allow Jesus to fill the void? To be their Lord and Saviour.

VV46-50 Jesus' spiritual family

- Similar to the end of ch. 11, there is a positive note about the call to discipleship. Those who will follow Jesus, will be his family.