

Jesus vs 'hard-nosed religion'

Central text: Mark 3:1-6

This encounter had different results for the people involved. To one man it meant healing and blessing, to the Pharisees the outcome was different.

1. A great encounter

The Gospels are full of stories of so many who had tremendous encounters with Jesus: they were touched, never to be the same again. Many were healed and even dead were raised to life. So many received *beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness* (Is. 61:3).

The mission of Jesus was straightforward and it was good:

Acts 10:38 - *how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.*

Zechariah 8:15 - *So again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear.*

2. A different encounter

However, in the Gospels, we find people like the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Scribes, the Herodians, and temple priests who encountered Jesus... but in a different way and with a totally different outcome. These were people who would often come to discredit Jesus or to see if they could catch Him off-guard, or simply to disrupt or confront Him publicly.

Each of these religious groups somehow saw themselves as exclusive guardians of the mind of God. Moses gave the Israelites 10 commandments but they taught 613. They also added many traditions and precepts. They dictated what was right and wrong and enforced it with zeal. Paul, a former Pharisee who turned to Jesus said that they had zeal but '*not according to knowledge*' (Romans 10:2).

By the time Jesus came to the earth, they had built so many layers of doctrine and human tradition that they couldn't see the true word of God anymore. Jesus was the very word of God incarnate standing before them and they couldn't see it anymore.

Mark 7:9,13: V.9 - *He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.*

V.13 - *making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."*

3. Jesus resisted this group of people. He blessed the simple, healed the sick, spoke good news to the poor but resisted the religious elite of the day.

Mark 3:5 - *And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.*

Jesus was grieved (*deeply disturbed* – NIV) because of the hardness of their hearts. In their hearts, there was no room for compassion, no understanding of what in that moment, was really important in the eyes of God.

- a) They had greater concern for the Sabbath but this man's condition meant nothing to them.

Mark 2:27 ²⁷... *"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*

Romans 13:10b – *"Love is the fulfilment of the law"*

- b) In this passage, in **verse 4**, Jesus asks the question: *"Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent.* Look now at **verse 6**: *Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.*

They went out immediately – on the same Sabbath to do evil and to destroy. They broke their own rules: and that not to do good nor to save life but to do evil and to kill – on the Sabbath.

- c) He looked at them with anger.

The Bible says in Hebrews 4:15 that Jesus was human in every way, except without sin. He experienced strong human emotions but never sinned.

"He looked them in the eye, one after another, angry now, furious at their hard-nosed religion". (The Message)

Revelation 19:12a – *"His eyes were like a flame of fire,"...*

In love, there is room for righteous indignation:

Matthew 21:12-14 - ¹² *Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³ And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a 'den of thieves. ¹⁴ Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.*

4. 3 reasons why Jesus felt so strongly against them:

Matthew 23:13 - ¹³ *"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.*

- a) They misrepresented God

These were the ‘experts of all things God-related’ of the day. People would come to them to find out about the ways of God. Time and time again they misrepresented God.

b) They misinterpreted God’s word.

They created their own version of what God was saying. They added to it. They became *the blind leading the blind*. If they knew the Scriptures as they claimed to, then they would have identified Jesus when He came.

John 5:39-40 - *39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.*

If they knew the prophets, they would have immediately identified Jesus as the Messiah that was to come.

c) They misunderstood the heart of God

They failed to see the heart of God behind His commandments: love.

1 Timothy 1:5-7 *5 Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, 6 from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, 7 desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.*

Conclusion

1. There is a spirit (not of God) who runs parallel to the things of God and which feeds upon religious things. It claims to represent God but it is not the real deal. It is an impostor. Jesus opposed it. We need to be careful to discern it.
2. 2000 years later is the real Jesus visible to the world? We need to be intentional to peel off any layers of tradition, or humanistic thinking that may obscure the real Jesus.
3. It is our intention here at our church to introduce the authentic Jesus to the world – we want to represent Him well and lead everyone to an encounter with His power.

We don’t want to misrepresent God, misunderstand His heart or misinterpret His word.