

Bible Special 06-08-22a

This is Tuesday, the 22nd day of August 2006. We continue tonight our study on the primary nature of Christianity, the difference between Christianity and the religions of the world, the various kinds of religious belief that one encounters both in history and in the present. Specifically tonight, we're going to be looking further at the details, all of the details that I can glean on the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

We're studying the Gospel of John, and it's important for us to have firmly in mind who the various parties and factions are. So that's what we will look at in detail tonight. Let's take a moment as we begin to ask God's blessing on us as we study and fellowship together.

Father, how grateful we are for the life that you have granted us in Jesus Christ. We are so privileged to have been rescued from the kingdom of darkness, from a lost and hopeless condition, to have been given hope, to have been given purpose. Our lives have meaning.

They are well defined. We have goals that are not only discernible but are reachable. And we know that all of this is because of your love expressed through the Lord Jesus.

We thank you for your word and the truth that we find therein. We ask your blessing on us as we study it together. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. We introduced kind of a broad picture last time. I didn't give you a lot of detail about the practice and the belief system of the Pharisees and the Sadducees last time.

We took kind of a define the forest approach last time. And if you remember, what is the major idea we discussed last time with regard to the Pharisees in particular? Who are the Pharisees like in the modern day? Who is it that mixes tradition and scripture on an equal footing and assigns equal authority to themselves and their doctrines and their traditions as the holy scriptures? In the modern day, you find this in your Catholic church. In the ancient day, you found it in the Pharisees.

The Pharisees valued their tradition very highly. And in the same way, we see it in the modern day, and in particular in the Catholic church, there are others who to varying degrees have their traditions. In fact, most denominations have some sort of creedal affiliation, some sort of system of belief that is in some kind of partnership with the scripture itself.

It is a specific interpretation. It is a specific reading that is not just understood by individuals or a group of individuals, but has been graven in stone, as it were, and has become a creed and a policy and a statement of faith and a doctrinal declaration. There is nothing inherently wrong with that, as long as people understand that these sorts of condensations and formulations and explanations are just that.

They are not of equal weight or equal authority with scripture. But there are people who think

that they are, or who treat them as such in practice. Well, why did we even bring that up? It is interesting to know, it is interesting to realize, that the Catholics believe that the Pope can say a thing and you might as well write it in your Bible in a new book, because that is as good as scripture.

And the Pharisees believed that their tradition, carefully preserved over the decades and the centuries, had the same weight as God's word itself. But do you remember, do you recall the application that we made? Because it is one thing to know that and to observe it, it is something else to say, well, so what? I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and I am a human being. The tendencies that show up in groups of human beings tend to show up in individual human beings as well.

This is one of the major principles of interpretation in the Bible, isn't it? We look at the Old Testament and see the nation of Israel, a group of believers, and the conduct and the history of that nation tends to provide lessons for individual instruction, individual application for us as believers today. They had a national priesthood, we have an individual priesthood. They had a national leadership and responsibility, accountability before God, we have an individual accountability before God.

God led them as a nation, He leads us as individuals. And God does not deal with us as the chosen church or as the chosen nation. He deals with us as a chosen individual.

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God is really a description of our privilege, our opportunity as individual believers. This is not to diminish the role of fellowship or all of those 50 or 60 one another commands in the New Testament, but it is to recognize that first and foremost, you and I are custodians of our own soul. We function as our own priest.

We function as our own representative through Christ to God the Father. Christ has made a way. He intercedes on our behalf, but we are to enter the throne room.

We are to come before God. Our hearts having been sprinkled, our bodies having been washed, and all those other great things in Hebrews 10. The love of God has been shed abroad, not in our nation or in our church, but in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Romans 5. So, why do I review all of that? Because it is one thing to point a finger and say, look at those silly Pharisees putting tradition up with Scripture.

It is one thing to point at the Catholics and say, look at those silly Catholics putting tradition up along with Scripture. It is something else to look at ourselves and say, am I putting my beliefs, my experiences, do I have sort of a tradition set that I have adopted that I personally respect on an equal par with Scripture? Is my viewpoint of life based on Scripture or is it Scripture and my little set of predetermined beliefs? Predetermined viewpoint. Do I have a tradition? Am I really sort of a little Pharisee where, well, yes, God's word up to a point, but I've got my own ideas about some other things and I'm going to squeeze God's word in to fit my views.

This is a really dangerous thing, because if you look at the history of Israel, you look at the history of people who have made this sort of a choice, this is how you wind up with your inquisitions. This is how you wind up with your persecutions. This is how you wind up with a lot of things that seem horrifying when we look back at them in history.

And yet at the time they made perfect sense to people because they had a belief system, separate and distinct from Scripture, that told them they were right. And they called it Christianity or they called it Judaism or they called it, we are the people of God. And the Kool-Aid drinkers down in Jonestown and the nut jobs over there in Waco and a lot of these other strange cults, the people up in Mormon land just saw a bunch of them self-creating, creating ex nihilo, a news incident, by sending their kids down to some building in a town in Utah and cardboard signs.

They just had their own little rally. And about 250 little offshoots of the Mormons. You know, the Mormons well over 100 years ago, 120 or 130 years ago, they disavowed polygamy, but there have always been little minority offshoots in the Latter-day Saints who think that polygamy is great.

And so a bunch of little polygamy children went down there with their signs. I mean, they're not going to arrest the kids, are they? And so the kids all got up and set up a podium and microphone and ranted for a while in front of the cameras and just created a news incident arguing for polygamy. They think they're right.

They think they're God's people. They think this is God's way. They've convinced themselves of it and they're just as wet as if he'd been standing out here in my yard about an hour ago in that wonderful downpour that we had.

It lasted about ten minutes, but during those ten minutes it was great. Well, we don't want to be that way. This is the whole thing.

If you fall asleep five minutes from now, this is what you need to remember from tonight. Don't be a Pharisee. Don't be a person who puts tradition or a personal belief set up on a par with Scripture.

God's Word is God's Word. Man's Word is not God's Word. It's not on a par with God's Word.

It's not a substitute. It's not a companion. It's not a helpmeet.

It's not a co-equal, co-eternal anything. It's God's Word and God's Spirit and that's it. This is why we are a non-denominational church.

We are an independent Bible church and that is with great malice aforethought. It would be easy for us to affiliate. It would be easy for us to jine a denomination and there are some good candidates for that.

There are some advantages. Churches can act in concert within a denomination to do things that individual churches, especially small churches, cannot do, such as finance missionaries full time. Wouldn't it be a great thing to send somebody to Africa or to Indonesia or to the Orient or to the Middle East or to Europe as a missionary and support them so that they could do nothing but preach and teach the Word of God and try to raise up a corpus, a nucleus of indigenous pastors who could begin to do their own teaching and start churches there.

It would be a wonderful thing. Churches like us, we're not large enough to do that. Even fair-sized churches, by the time they pay their bills and pay their pastor and so on, they can't do that.

Denominations can do that. And I think God does use denominations in that way. I don't know that it's His ideal, but I don't think God waits for the ideal to accomplish His purpose.

If He waited for the ideal, nothing would ever happen because nothing in this life is ideal. Nothing. As people, we're not ideal.

As couples, we're not ideal. As families, we're not ideal. As a church, we're not ideal.

As a society, we're not ideal. Whatever definition, whatever perspective, we're not ideal. God doesn't wait for the ideal.

And the reason that's important is don't think that because God is blessing or because God is working or because God is accomplishing evangelism or teaching that He necessarily condones the environment or the method or the organization that's doing it. People may get saved in the Sun-Moon-Moon church. And I think they do.

I think there's been scads of people, probably thousands of people that have heard the Gospel and gotten saved through Sun-Moon-Moon. And God does not approve of that organization and the teachings of that organization. But God's not going to wait for them to get straightened out.

He's not going to say, I'm sorry, anybody that listens to you, I'm not going to save them. The Apostle Paul talks about this in another place. Well, the reason we are bringing this whole subject up is we're taking a close look tonight at the Pharisees and at the Sadducees.

Our goal is twofold. First of all, we want to educate ourselves so that when we see Pharisee or Sadducee in the Scripture and a couple of other terms that we're going to become acquainted with tonight, we'll know exactly what it means, what it connotes, who the people are and what they believe and what their attitudes and motivations are. Secondly, it ought to be applicable.

It ought to be something that we check ourselves for. Am I becoming Pharisaic? Am I becoming a traditionalist? Am I becoming hypocritical? Am I pursuing an agenda alongside the plan and purpose of God that is of my own making? The best way to find this out is to see other people doing it and then check ourselves. Lots of us find out things from other people, don't we? You

talk to somebody and they say, Oh, you know, I was walking the other day and I got this shooting pain down the back of my left leg and it just nearly immobilized me and it was horrible.

And you come to find out they go to the doctor and it's sciatic. And then some time later you start getting a shooting pain down your left leg and you say, you know, I wonder if that's sciatic. Why do we even wonder that? Where do we get that information? We observed it in someone else.

This is the root of hypochondria where you hear and see things in other people and you think you've got all of them. Well, there is a healthy way of learning by observation and that's what we want to do. Not just to look and to find the flaws but to identify those flaws and be aware of them so that we can see them if they start cropping up in us.

That's really the best and ultimate purpose. So, the Pharisees. One thing you know about them already is they highly value tradition.

Where did they come from? Their name, Pharisee, has to do with, it literally means the separatists, those who separate, those who paras, parets, remember the son of Judah, Perez, means breach, to break through or break apart. This has the idea of separating. The Pharisees separate themselves unto holiness.

If they had a football team, they'd call them the saints. We're the separate ones. We're the sanctified.

We've set ourselves apart. We're the set apart. Now, the Pharisees are not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament.

Neither are the Sadducees. Neither are the Essenes or the Zealots or the Heronias. None of those people are mentioned in the Old Testament.

But we do have quite a bit of information about them. As I mentioned last time, Josephus, particularly in his great magnum opus called Antiquities of the Jews, we find a lot of information because he's describing the history of the Jews. There's a little bit also in the Jewish Wars.

Generally, you'll find Antiquities of the Jews, or sometimes it's called the Jewish Antiquities, gives us quite a bit. But in fact, Josephus himself claims to have been a Pharisee. When he was a teenager, at the age of 16 or so, he became interested in religion and he looked around to see which one he wanted to join.

He investigated all of them and he went with the Pharisees. And for three years, according to his own account, his autobiography, Josephus says he joined up with the Pharisees and performed all of their traditions and did a whole rigorous program of self-denial and asceticism and training and so on. And he came out of it at the age of 19.

He did it for three years. So when Josephus speaks about the Pharisees, we feel like he's probably got some credibility and some insight because he's seen them from the inside out. He first talks about them historically as cropping up in the time of the Hasmoneans.

Do you remember the whole story of the captivity of the Jews? The temple was burnt and torn down in 586. Jews go into the Babylonian captivity. Seventy years later, circa 515 or so, you have the second temple built.

People cry because it's such a sad, pale imitation of Solomon's original. But it gets gradually refurbished and so on. The people come back to the land.

You go through the time of Esther. You come on down. You get Antiochus Epiphanes sacrificing pigs and slaughtering Jews, one thing and another.

And then you have the Maccabees rising up. And this is circa 160 B.C. where you have Jonathan who makes himself the high priest. Remember, the Hasmoneans are not Levites.

But everything is in such disarray that they say, somebody's got to jump in here and do this. And so they pretty much put themselves into the priesthood. So Jonathan makes himself high priest.

He's high priest for about 17 years, 160 to 143 B.C. Josephus is describing this, and he says that there were Pharisees around at that time. So we know they go back at least a couple hundred years before Christ. They believe that some things in life are fate.

They're just destiny. Some of them are under human control. There's things you can control, and there are things you can't.

They would have had the original refrigerator magnet that said, Would God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change? Because they're fate. Some things are within human power. So he mentions this in connection with talking about the earliest historical mention of the Pharisees anywhere is in this period, 160 to 140 B.C. in Josephus.

And that's what he says about him in that passage. Later on, 134 and about 30 years down to about 104 B.C., you have John Hyrcanus is a Hasmonean leader in Israel. And he says that Hyrcanus prospers and does well in his reign.

And this prosperous state of affairs moved the Jews to envy Hyrcanus. Those who were worst disposed toward him were the Pharisees, who are one of the sects of the Jews, as we have informed you already. And listen to this.

They, the Pharisees, have so great a power over the multitude that when they say anything against the king or against the high priest, they are immediately believed. So, woe unto the leader. Woe unto the personage that the Pharisees decide they don't like and start speaking against because the people are under the sway of the Pharisees.

They believe the Pharisees have got a pipe to God. The Pharisees have got it figured out. You can envision this similar situation by looking at the analogy of the Catholic Church in centuries gone by, where if you ran afoul of the church, you were in deep trouble because if the church spoke against you, if the church excommunicated you, all of the people were suddenly against you because they want to stay in good with the church.

He comes down later, in the next 25 years, say 103 to 75 B.C., and this is King Alexander Janais and his wife, Queen Salome Alexandra. So, you've got Alexander and Alexandra. Salome Alexandra.

And they're just about 100 years before Christ. Okay? You still with me? 100 years before Jesus. What's 100 years before now? 1904? 1906? Around in there? About that long before Christ, you have this Alexander Janais and his wife, Queen Salome.

He's a Hasmonean and he's one of the most hated rulers that the Jews ever had. They hated him. They hated his guts.

And this resulted in a civil war because he abused his power and you'll hear why. There was a civil war where people were trying to get rid of him because he was such a horrible guy. And so people kept rising up trying to get him off of the throne and he kept putting down these rebellions.

This is the Jewish civil war and this is what Josephus says about it. He was fighting a battle up somewhere and then he went to Jerusalem and besides his other ill success, the nation insulted him and he fought against them for six years and slew no fewer than 50,000 of the rebels. He slew 50,000 people.

That's like a football stadium full. Which is a lot in the ancient day. When he desired that they would desist from their ill will to him, they hated him so much the more.

Be hard not to. Everybody knew somebody that had been killed by this guy. When he asked them what he ought to do, he got tired of constantly putting down these rebellions.

He slaughtered them and they still kept rebelling and he said, look, what do you want me to do? And you know what they said? Kill yourself. That was their answer. When he asked them what he ought to do, they all cried out that he ought to kill himself.

The best thing you can do for us is die. So on his deathbed, he tells the queen, Salome Alexandra, he says, look, what you need to do to get over this problem is you've got to buy off the Pharisees. You've got to get the Pharisees on your side because they're the only ones that can turn popular opinion back in your favor.

So he said to basically give them a big gift and put some of her authority in their hand. Raise them to political power. Put the Pharisees in charge and make them beholden to her so that they'll tell the people, look, the queen's not so bad.

Alexander was a bad guy, but he's dead. But Queen Salome Alexandra, she's great. So this was his advice.

They will commend her for the honor that she does them and they will reconcile the nation to her. So what this tells us about the Pharisees is they moved from being strictly religious leaders and influential amongst the people to actually having political power. And this happens about 100 years before Christ.

Because the queen follows this advice and Josephus says she permitted the Pharisees to do everything. And she ordered the multitude to be obedient to them. She restored again those practices which the Pharisees had introduced according to the traditions of their forefathers which her father-in-law Hyrcanus had abrogated.

A lot of the religious traditions had been stopped by Hyrcanus. She brought them back to appease the Pharisees. She had the name of regent, but the Pharisees had the authority.

It was they who restored people that were banished. The Pharisees set those who were prisoners at liberty. And to say all at once, the Pharisees differed in nothing from lords.

They were the lords of the realm. But, Josephus says, these Pharisees artfully insinuated themselves into her favor little by little and became the real administrators of public affairs. They banished and reduced whom they pleased.

They bound and loosed men at their pleasure. And to say all at once, they had the enjoyment of royal authority while the expenses and the difficulties of it belonged to Alexander. She paid the bills and got all the flack and they exercised all the power.

Now, you remember I said that that big civil war where Alexander was so hated. Here's one of the things that he did. The Jews fought against Alexander and being beaten were slain in great numbers in the battles which they had.

He shut up the most powerful of them in the city of Bethom. He besieged them when he had taken the city and he got the men into their power. He brought them to Jerusalem and did one of the most barbarous actions in the world to them for he was feasting with his concubines in the sight of all the city.

He ordered about 800 of these men to be crucified and while they were living, they were up on the cross, dying. While they were still alive, he ordered the throats of their children and wives to be cut before their eyes. So he hung these guys on the cross and crucified them and while they were in the act of dying, he brought their families in front and cut their throats and killed them right in front of these dying men.

800 men. Now, scholars believe that the bulk of these opponents of Alexander were Pharisees because the Pharisees initially were the ones giving the Queen the most trouble. When Alexander said, you need to buy them off, you need to appease them and get them to get the

people on your side, Josephus says, the country was entirely at peace excepting the Pharisees for they disturbed the Queen and desired that she would kill those who persuaded Alexander to slay the 800 men.

She said, look, the idea here is we want vengeance, we want justice for those who murdered our compatriots. After which they cut the throat of one of them, Diogenes, and after him they did the same to several, one after the other. So the Pharisees got their vengeance and they wanted vengeance on behalf of these 800 which makes you think those 800 were Pharisees also.

Well, the Pharisees show up again in 20 B.C. when they run into King Herod. Josephus says, there was a sect of men that were Jews who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers. They made men believe they were highly favored by God.

They are called the sect of the Pharisees and they are in the capacity of greatly opposing kings. And you can see why. They go back to Alexander, they want power for themselves.

Josephus says, a cunning sect they were and soon elevated to a pitch of open fighting and doing mischief. Accordingly, when all the people of the Jews gave assurance of their good will to Caesar and to the king's government, these very men refused to swear allegiance to Caesar. Being above 6,000, 6,000 of them said, we're not going to raise our hand and pledge allegiance to Caesar.

When the king imposed a fine upon them, Herod's sister-in-law is a rich woman. She paid the fine for these Pharisees for not taking the oath. In order to requite this kindness of hers, since they were believed to have foreknowledge of things to come by divine inspiration, they prophesied how God had decreed that Herod's government would cease and his posterity would be deprived of it and the kingdom would come instead to her and to Feroris.

In other words, Herod's going to go away and Herod's brother, Feroris, and this nice lady who paid their fine were going to come into power. The Pharisees predicted this to make her happy. These predictions were not concealed from Salome, but were told to the king and how they had perverted some persons about the palace itself, so the king slew such of the Pharisees as were principally accused.

So this was a little intrigue on the side that the Pharisees were involved in. So they are deeply political. So, this is what we know of the Pharisees' history and origins up to the time of Christ.

They started out being very religious. They got the sway and the power over the people and then they moved into politics. And now, they are the ones who resist political authority.

They think they should hold it. They should decide civil matters as well as religious. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to take a look at the Sadducees and a couple of things about

the Pharisees and Sadducees that are going to really help us in our future studies. Let's pause here and take our break.